

Carver County, Minnesota

Today's Efforts Focusing on Tomorrow's Needs

In 2002, the Carver County Health Partnership, a nonprofit organization, set up a Senior Commission to look at aging-related issues for the county. A Master Plan on Aging was outlined, and the groundwork laid for the establishment of the Carver County Office of Aging (CCOA). In 2007 the county's Board of Commissioners created the CCOA and today that agency is helping prepare for the region's aging population of tomorrow.

As a result of their visionary work, the Carver County Public Health Division and the Carver County Health Partnership were awarded the Environmental Protection Agency's 2007 Commitment Award for Excellence in Building Healthy Communities for Active Aging.

Katy Boone, a planner for the CCOA, explains that the age 65 and older population of Carver County, located in the Minneapolis-Saint Paul Metropolitan Area, is forecast in increase four-fold by 2030. She notes that the county is focusing on assuring access to affordable healthcare, opportunities for older adults to connect with others through lifelong learning, increased awareness and utilization of community-based services by the senior population, workshops for elected officials that focus on senior-related topics, and assurance that the healthcare work force can meet the needs of the aging population.

"The development of a County Office on Aging is the direct result of community involvement at the grassroots level focused on public education, outreach to local citizens, and the collaboration of government and community organizations," says Boone. "We realized there was a need to plan now for the future. This is especially important when we look at the large baby boomer population. Currently more than 19 percent of our population is aged 45 to 64, and another seven and a half percent is over aged 65," Boone notes.

Since its launch, the Office on Aging has aggressively tackled issues to help the county and its municipalities address practical issues for tomorrow's older population. In December 2008 the CCOA sponsored a day-long conference, *Challenge for Carver County: Developing Communities for Boomer Residents*. The conference addressed many of the issues facing the county and its cities as they prepare for a new and much larger generation of older residents. Discussion centered around the need to develop communities with the amenities, services and housing options tailored to the needs of the Boomers, who will have different expectations and demands for aging services than previous generations.

The county has also been working with the University of Minnesota – Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (UM-CURA). Graduate students in that program have been engaged in planning projects with the county. As a result, survey instruments have been developed that will enable communities to better understand the needs and wants of their boomer residents. Boone noted that as a result of focus groups in Watertown, community leaders learned that about 75 percent of the Boomer residents were bicycle riders. They wanted to see the development of shopping areas and restaurants they could bike to. "It is important for us to understand what the Boomer population wants so we can maintain them as residents in our county," said Boone.

She explains that the county is also addressing housing for the aging population. Much of the area's housing consists of single-family two-story homes. While this type of home is ideal for many younger families, these types of homes do not always meet the needs of aging residents want. "We are looking at community design that includes more town houses, twin-homes, and universal design. We know that many middle age adults want these smaller homes, but they expect the homes to be attractive and have the

same type of amenities they had in their larger homes. We are also looking at zoning and ordinance issues related to residential building and development.

An example of what is being done in Carver County can be seen in the City of Waconia, where the Carver County Community Development Agency developed a 68-unit senior housing facility co-located with the city offices and the public library, assuring convenient access for older adults.

Victoria was the first of the county's cities to implement a Walkable Communities Workshop, which has now also been conducted by Norwood Young America, Watertown, and Waconia. The Walkable Communities Workshop targeted local elected officials, public administrators, health officials, transportation planners, and local residents. Sponsored by Carver County Public Health as part of its Active Living Initiative, the workshops focus on:

- Neighborhood and community public gathering centers, parks, and open space.
- Sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes, and trails.
- Traffic-calming roadway design.
- Benches, lighting, trees, and plants.
- Housing near work and jobs
- Nearby shops, restaurants, and amenities.
- Public transportation.

“The Office on Aging has raised community awareness about the anticipated growth in the county’s older adult population and the need to utilize smart growth and active aging principles to meet the needs of this population,” notes Katy Boone with the Office on Aging.

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About the Award

2007 Commitment Award for Excellence in Building Healthy Communities for Active Aging

The award honors the communities that are planning for, and beginning to use, smart growth and active aging. Active aging strives to promote strategies that engage older adults through structured and unstructured opportunities for physical activity. Active aging is supported by safe, walkable environments. Smart growth strives to minimize the impact of the built environment on both human health and the natural environment by integrating environmental considerations into development patterns. Using smart growth, communities create attractive, walkable neighborhoods that give people of all ages, income levels, and physical abilities a range of safe, affordable and convenient choices in where to live and how to get around.

For additional information, please visit the EPA’s Aging Initiative Web site at <http://www.epa.gov/aging/bhc/awards/index.htm>.