



Eliot Aging-in-Place After Action Report

Introduction

In late 2017, the Eliot Select Board created the Eliot Aging-in-Place Committee (AIP) as an advisory group to recommend strategies, services, programs, and regulations to better enable residents to remain here as they age. Its duties were to identify existing resources, key obstacles, and potential solutions. Seeking input from residents of all ages.

AIP distributed a community survey that was completed by 330 residents who identified property tax relief, communication, public transportation, communication, recreational opportunities, walking/biking safety and the ADU ordinance as areas for improvement. During 2019, public meetings engaged residents to create an Action Plan focused on the domains of Housing, Transportation, Communication and Outdoor Spaces.



Mission

AIP found direction by focusing on its purpose and mission statement.

That is, to provide advocacy for changes in Eliot's physical, economic and social environments that enable residents, especially older residents, to live in their homes as long as possible and that foster the creation of services and programs geared to keeping all residents engaged and active in the community.

Assigned a town staff member to facilitate the work, AIP established a close relationship with the select board and town manager. Frequent communication with them and other town officials was key to AIP's success in achieving its goals.



Key Outcomes

Since 2000, AIP's senior tax assistance program was approved and implemented. AIP has collaborated with the Planning Commission to improve the ADU ordinance; created a communication plan that includes a website, monthly newsletters, Facebook and Instagram accounts; and installed 7 permanent benches in two public spaces. Flowering perennials were added two years ago.

AIP consulted with the town planner to develop a comprehensive plan to improve walking and biking safety. During the pandemic, the domains of Social Participation and Civil Engagement were added to the Action Plan. AIP partnered with the Foundation for Arts and Healing to offer zoom-based facilitated groups to address aging issues and isolation through creative art activities.



Housing: Affordability

The Housing domain was the initial focus in the first year of the Action Plan. That was, to provide property tax burden relief and increase the square footage of accessible dwelling units (ADUs). Although the COVID19 outbreak interrupted and shifted the committee's focus, this goal was achieved.

AIP's proposal for an Eliot Senior Taxpayer Assistance Program was passed by town voters in June 2020 for implementation on July,1, 2021.

In FY22, the town voters approved \$20,000, and six households were granted a total of \$3,481. In FY23, \$13,391 was approved for 16 of the 29 applicants. The remaining balance of this original allotment is \$3,481.



Housing: Accessible Dwelling Units (ADUs)

Feedback from the AIP community assessment survey and residents' comments at two public meetings revealed that the 650 square footage allowance for ADUs was a barrier to residents considering this option for downsizing.

AIP collaborated with the Eliot Planning Commission in the revision of the ADU town ordinance. The revised ordinance increased the square footage allowance to 1000 square feet.



Outdoor Spaces

The installation of five benches at the Eliot Boat Basin and two at the William Fogg Library has encouraged residents of all ages to enjoy nature, socialize, and be more active.

To further involve residents in celebrating the benches, AIP held “The Benches Writing Contest” which invited Eliot residents aged 8-108 to submit a poem, short story, or essay on what the new benches meant to them. Winners in five age categories received award certificates and \$50 Barnes & Noble gift cards. The winners were announced at the 2021 Eliot Fall Festival



Bench Writing Winners

A Quiet Place By Autumn Baldwin Age: 11

Nestled in a quiet place,
With grass so silky it feels like lace,
There's a simple bench, wood or stone,

Enjoy the rustle of the breeze,
A place to put your mind at ease,
Let your soul wander far,
Guided by a shining star.

A place you can read or simple look,
You won't find this in a book,
A magic you can call your own,
A simple star that has shone.

With sky so blue and oh so clear,
You have nothing to fear,
As you sit on a bench, wood or stone,
There's a quiet place, barely known.

A bench, a simple, spectacular, quiet bench.



Outdoor Spaces

AIP continues to enhance the Eliot Boat Basin landscape by planting and tending perennial flowers. With the help of local volunteers, two additional flower beds have been added.

The challenge of plant waterings for a dry, hot summer was eased by a collaboration with the Public Works and Community Services Departments. They placed a 500-gallon water tank accessible to the beds. Timely refills of this tank contributed to successful plant growth and significantly reduced the work of dedicated AIP volunteers who continue to help ensure the uniqueness of this riverside space.



Outdoor Spaces: Pickleball Plus

Eliot residents who regularly play pickleball attended several AIP meetings to share concerns about the pickleball facilities at Frost Tufts Park. The key issues were the current condition of the tennis courts where pickleball is played and lack of courts to accommodate the increasing number of interested residents.

AIP recognized this concern as an opportunity to improve outdoor spaces, increase socialization, and promote exercise for all. AIP members met with the new town manager and town planner to relay these concerns.

The outcome has been the allocation of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to improve Frost Tufts Park that would enhance basketball, tennis, and pickleball facilities.



Communication and Information



AIP achieved its goal to implement a comprehensive communication plan. It began with members attending meetings of select boards and town committees and booths at the annual Fall Festival and all town elections.

The AIP Facebook group page and Instagram account began in May 2021. Facebook has 100 followers and 110 following. The Instagram account has 43 followers and 57 following.

Distribution of the monthly e-newsletter began in September 2021. It is now emailed to 256 followers and mailed directly to 26 residents. The William Fogg Library prints and distributes additional copies. Hard-copies are delivered to four locations.

Communication and Information

AIP has grown its inclusion on the Town website to serve as a communication home for people to find AIP newsletters and information. Information sent out via the newsletter, Facebook, and Instagram range from health and wellness news to resources for food, heating, and property tax relief.

Posted information is provided from our partners which include the William Fogg Library, Town of Eliot, Eliot Strong, Eliot Connects, Southern Maine Agency on Aging, Maine Agency on Aging, and AARP. AIP will advance these avenues and their reach to best communicate with Eliot residents.



Transportation: Biking and Walking Safety



Since its inception, AIP has advocated for safer walking and biking in Eliot. Residents of all ages enjoy walking and biking as an easy way to get out and exercise.

AIP enthusiastically collaborated with Town Planner Jeff Brubaker in his extensive work to identify improvement opportunities to make these activities safer.

His comprehensive report, “Improving Conditions for People to Walk and Bike in Eliot” has been approved by the Town and serves as the basis for proposed changes in mobility and safety. The Town approved \$200,000 in American Rescue Funds to begin implementation. Top priorities are extending sidewalks down State Road, Eliot’s “main” street, and installing new sidewalks on Beech Road.

Goals for the Future



Develop an immediate plan to make Eliot a more dementia inclusive community

Continue to collaborate with the town of Eliot as it works with the towns of Kittery, South Berwick, Berwick and York and the Maine DOT to improve bicycle and pedestrian safety in Southern Maine.

Update the action plan based upon the outcomes of the Comprehensive Plan Survey

Monitor process to assure additional funds are requested in November 2023 to support funding of the Eliot Senior Tax Assistance Program for FY24.

Explore opportunities to expand the number of affordable, reliable and convenient transportation options, the only goal of the Action Plan not achieved.