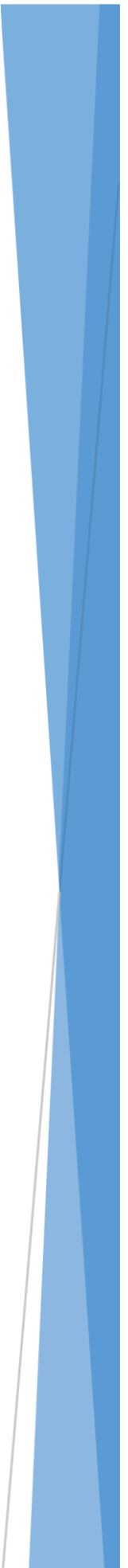


**CITY OF BLOOMINGTON**  
**commission on aging**

**Annual Report for 2017**



# COMMISSION ON AGING ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2017

## INTRODUCTORY NOTE:

This commission seeks to raise public awareness of aging-related issues, and to advocate for policies and programs that will address the problems and challenges of our community's aging population. We work in collaboration with a wide range of community organizations to build bridges, open dialogue, explore issues and concerns, encourage programming, and celebrate the accomplishments of older adults.

Our report is presented in three sections, as follows:

WHO WE ARE presents a collective resume of our members, including relevant community affiliations.

WHAT WE DID IN 2017 provides brief summaries of, and any next steps for:

- Reconceptualizing Our Creative Aging Work
- Launching Our Efforts to Support Seniors in Poverty
- Advocating for Inclusion of Aging-Related Issues in the City's Comprehensive Plan
- Promoting Dementia-Friendliness in Bloomington
- Celebrating Eco Heroes of All Ages
- Gathering Words of Wisdom
- Identifying the Concerns Expressed by Seniors in the City's Community Survey

OUR PLANS FOR 2018 outlines our big-picture view as we begin the new year.

We would welcome the opportunity to address any questions that readers of this report might have about our work.

Respectfully submitted by:

Denise Lessow, Chair

Phil Stafford, Vice Chair

Lauren Cowan

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## WHO WE ARE:

Presumably you've already skimmed the list of our names on the previous page. Perhaps you recognized two or three because we are your neighbors, or your professional colleagues? But even if you recognized *all* of our names, we hope you will find something to surprise you in this brief overview of our collective experience and expertise.

We range in age from 45 to 86. None of us were born in Bloomington, but one of us has lived here for 41 of her 52 years! And one of us is a relative "newcomer" to town, having lived here only ten of his 86 years.

We bring a variety of disciplinary viewpoints to our work on the Commission. In college we specialized in fields such as art history, commerce and engineering, cultural anthropology, electronic engineering, English literature, gerontology, information science, interior architectural design, nursing, photography, public management, psychology, recreation administration, and studio arts. Most of us hold masters degrees; three of us hold doctorates.

We also bring a wide range of professional perspectives to our work. One of us served as Director of IU's Center on Aging and Community for 17 years. Another is co-owner of a local business (Agewise Design) that plans and creates safe and accessible environments for homeowners who want to "age in place." Others have worked at key service providers for Bloomington's aging population—e.g., the Area 10 Agency on Aging, Bell Trace, Elder Care Home Connections, and Meadowood. Additional professional affiliations have included Bloomington Hospital, IBM, Pinnacle School, South Central Community Mental Health Center, and a number of different schools or administrative units at Indiana University.

Finally, we bring an assortment of community service connections to our work. These are very useful, since we are committed to helping Bloomington increase its capacity to support its aging population. Such work never is really "done," nor can it be advanced effectively by any one group on its own. During the past year our networking has included:

- AARP Tax Assistance
- Active Aging Coalition
- Active Living Coalition
- American Society on Aging
- Area 10 Agency on Aging
- Arts Alliance of Greater Bloomington
- Bloomington Meals on Wheels
- City Council's Affordable Living Committee
- City of Bloomington Environmental Commission
- Dementia-Friendly Bloomington
- IU Emeriti House
- IU Mathers Museum of World Cultures
- IU Retirees Association
- Local Council of Women

- Mathers Lifeways
- Memory Bridge Foundation
- Monroe County Historical Society
- Monroe County Public Library
- Monroe County Suicide Prevention Coalition
- National Center for Creative Aging
- Sally's Place
- South Central Community Action Program

This overview of our networking provides a useful context for the next section of this report, in which you will find some of these groups cited again. Much of our work relies heavily on collaboration with such partners.

## WHAT WE DID IN 2017:

### ***Reconceptualizing Our Creative Aging Work:***

As suggested in the closing section of last year's report, this year we formally decided to replace our creative aging "festival" concept with a "series" approach. Given that, we no longer are developing and coordinating a month-long calendar of activities held across town and campus each May, which is Older Americans Month.

This new "series" approach is responsive to the needs expressed by several Festival participants and partners in the past. It also is both more flexible, and more expansive. It will allow us to promote selected creative aging events no matter when they are mounted, rather than focusing exclusively on events held in May.

After refining the objectives of our creative aging work to better fit this new model, we developed a set of criteria for selecting future events:

1. Events must meet at least two of the creative aging objectives; of the two objectives, one must be the first (which is "provide educational opportunities to enhance awareness about issues relative to the aging population").
2. Event organizers must enter into a partnership agreement via a memorandum of understanding with the City of Bloomington Commission on Aging.
3. Strong events will involve collaboration between two or more different organizations.

We also have outlined a possible schedule of collaborative events for next year, and we have tentative plans for four such events. As those events are finalized, we will announce more details.

### ***Launching Our Efforts to Support Seniors in Poverty:***

"Seniors in poverty" has long been one of our underlying concerns, but we have not specifically highlighted it in past years. Instead, the relevant work we've done in the past has been at the big-picture level—i.e., looking at data and policy or planning issues.

For example, in our 2016 Best Cities for Successful Aging (BCFSA) Report, one of the four indicators we targeted for in-depth analysis was “percentage of 65+ population below the poverty line.” We found Bloomington’s performance on this indicator disturbing, even though we questioned some aspects of the BCFSA ranking process. Additionally, throughout 2016 and 2017 we have continued to advocate for clear demonstration of how the City hopes to address relevant Imagine Bloomington principles such as to “meet basic needs and ensure self-sufficiency for all residents” in its new Comprehensive Plan.

But as we began to lay plans for more specific work on this focus in 2017, we quickly realized that those plans would overlap significantly with what the Council’s Affordable Living Committee (ALC) already was doing. And, two Commissioners already were participating regularly in the ALC work.

So rather than duplicate the ALC’s efforts, two additional Commissioners offered supplementary contributions to it. Taken together, the contributions of these four Commissioners provided some support to all three of the areas for which the ALC had formed subcommittees: Housing and Transportation, Food and Health Care, Employment and Child Care.

For 2018, our expectation is to move forward by using the ALC findings and recommendations—along with data extracted from the Community Survey (see later section)—to refine our focus in approaching this work.

### ***Advocating for Inclusion of Aging-Related Issues in the City’s Comprehensive Master Plan:***

The Commission continued its active advocacy and educational roles throughout the Comprehensive Plan process. The Commission had provided an exhaustive, page-by-page commentary on the original draft of the Plan, and had thereby succeeded in substantially increasing use of aging-related references.

We verified this by conducting word searches for a wide range of aging-related terms (such as “seniors,” “elders,” “older adults,” and all variants of such terms) in both the original draft and its revision, and then comparing the results. Use of aging-related language had doubled in the revised draft.

Then, during the next phase of public input, we focused our attention specifically on the set of outcomes and indicators in each chapter. The indicators will be used to measure the “success” of the Plan in the future. Thus, we determined that focusing the indicators would ensure that aging-related concerns were being addressed effectively, and in measurable ways.

We compared the indicators in the Plan with those used by AARP in assessing livability across metropolitan areas in the US. We then proposed a series of 21 amendments to those in the Plan. Fourteen of our 21 amendments were considered so reasonable that they were included on the “consent agenda” for the Plan Commission’s June 5 meeting, where they were passed without discussion. Another five were passed with friendly modifications; only two failed to find support.

Since then, the Plan has been forwarded to City Council for review. Individual Commissioners have continued to attend public input sessions and, through their testimony or research, initiate amendments for changes such as: broader application of the Lifetime Community concept in the land use chapter; restructuring of the introductory section in each chapter to correctly identify where Imagine Bloomington principles are being addressed; and indexing of the whole document for more efficient access to concepts in which seniors (and other members of the public) are interested. All of these proposals have found support on the Council.

At this writing the Comprehensive Plan still is under Council review, and we will continue to provide input.

### ***Promoting Dementia-Friendliness in Bloomington:***

We have been working in collaboration with IU Health Bloomington to form Dementia Friendly Bloomington (DFB), the first local "chapter" in Indiana of the national Dementia Friendly America effort.

We collaborated with DFB colleagues on offering a workshop in May. The workshop was facilitated by one of our Commissioners, and it brought together key people across several community sectors to learn first-hand about what life is like for those with dementia. Mayor Hamilton was unable to attend this workshop in person, but he provided concrete evidence of his backing by issuing a proclamation in support of it.

The goal of this effort is to focus on creating better life experiences for people with dementia. Too often the stigma associated with dementia causes those affected to isolate themselves. We want to find ways to change this, so that Bloomington can become a community where those with dementia can age with dignity.

We plan to take DFB's formal training session ourselves early in 2018, thereby becoming Bloomington's first dementia-friendly commission.

### ***Celebrating Eco Heroes of All Ages:***

In past years, the Environmental Commission's (EC) Eco Heroes has been an environmentally-themed art contest focused exclusively on school-age children. But for 2017, the EC approached us about collaborating to make it an all-ages event!

In honor of this new cross-generational collaboration, the contest theme chosen for 2017 was "Embracing Our Aging Planet." It was open to artists of all ages working in all media (paintings, fiber arts, songs, essays, etc). Entries were displayed in City Hall, and Mayor Hamilton awarded prizes in each age group at a ceremony on Earth Day, Saturday April 22.

In the new adult category, the winners were: Kristy Haunn, for her sculpture *Water is Life*; Carol Bridges, for her quilt *I Love My Planet*; and Jenny Donegan, for her sculpture *Return of the Goddess*.

For 2018, the Environmental Commission already has invited us to work with them on this event again, and we have appointed a liaison to facilitate that collaboration.

### ***Gathering Words of Wisdom:***

This year the Commission on Aging collaborated with several local organizations to collect *Words of Wisdom*. The project is a part of an ongoing effort to increase connections between the larger Bloomington community, seniors, and those living alone.

Using a series of questions or prompts on a variety of subjects, participants were encouraged to reflect and respond with their thoughts. Those responses then were shared with the larger community in some type of formal artistic expression (song, poetry, etc). The project culminated on December 15 with a concert and fundraiser for Bloomington Meals on Wheels at the Unitarian Universalist Church.

### ***Identifying the Concerns Expressed by Seniors in the City's Community Survey:***

This year we formed a Data Task Force to assess various data resources and determine which ones would be most useful in guiding our work. After an initial review of potential resources, the Task Force recommended we begin by focusing on the City's 2017 Community Survey (CS).

Their reasoning was that CS data would be the most directly relevant to our work, as outlined in the statutory authority (2.23.090) establishing our Commission. There, the very first item listed under our *Purpose and Duties* is to "Develop study committees addressing concerns of seniors in health and wellness, housing, transportation, employment, social services and recreation."

Each Commissioner has an informed, but personal, sense of what the "concerns of seniors" in Bloomington are. However, we would like to be as comprehensive and objective as possible in identifying those concerns.

In past years, various Commission members have suggested doing our own survey of seniors to gather additional, direct input. But it is very difficult to do a really good job with a survey, and they are expensive to administer. We also know that any survey we attempted ourselves would never get the kind of response that the City's Community Survey did. And finally, that data already has been collected!

Thus, in late October we submitted the first part of a two-phased request to the Mayor's Office, asking for extraction of senior-age responses to key CS questions. At this writing, we are waiting to hear back regarding our request.

One of the survey questions cited in our initial request asked about the respondent's "financial security." As noted in the earlier section on seniors in poverty, we hope this particular data will help us with refining the focus of our work in that area.

### **OUR PLANS FOR 2018:**

As described in the sections above, many of our 2017 projects will carry over into 2018 and beyond. For example, our work related to creative aging and seniors in poverty will unfold throughout many years to come. And we expect some of our collaborative relationships to grow even stronger in the near future, such as that with Dementia Friendly Bloomington after we have taken their formal training.

In addition, we have just been approached again about advocating for a "senior center" (or a community center with senior programming) close to downtown. We have begun to assess what needs might be driving this request, and to brainstorm about all of the ways in which those needs might be addressed—that is, ranging from a traditional bricks-and-mortar center to a virtual, web-based "Senior Central."

However, we soon hope to have fresh data from the Community Survey to use for contextualizing that—and other possible projects—before we finalize our top priorities for 2018. As noted in the WHO WE ARE section of this report, we represent a number of different professional and personal perspectives. Nevertheless, there are only eight of us, whereas over 400 seniors responded to the Community Survey! Thus, having the CS data should provide us with a more comprehensive and objective picture of what concerns are **most** important to our community's aging population.