

# Age-Friendly Community



## Needs Assessment

May 2022



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## With thanks...

This report was made possible with the support of many community partners.

The City is grateful to Community and Home Assistance to Seniors (CHATS), which provided invaluable assistance in distributing surveys and hosting focus groups. Thanks also to the Richmond Hill Board of Trade, who co-hosted a focus group with the business community that serves older adults in Richmond Hill, and OnRichmondHill.com for promoting our survey and online focus group. Thank you to the Chartwell Oak Ridges Retirement Residences who graciously hosted an in-person focus group with their residents to inform this needs assessment.

Most of all, the City thanks the hundreds of Richmond Hill residents who provided their advice, experience and guidance throughout the consultation process.



Richmond Hill Seniors provide feedback at an Age-Friendly Community focus group in 2021. All in-person events followed community health guidelines at the time.

## Executive Summary

The City of Richmond Hill prepared this needs assessment based on feedback sought from residents to support its work in ensuring the City is an Age-Friendly Community.

What is an Age-Friendly Community? The World Health Organization (WHO) identifies age-friendly cities as those meeting specific needs of an aging population. WHO identified eight domains of community life that overlap and intersect to affect an individual's personal well-being and their independent and active living in physical and social environments. The identified domains are divided into three categories and are:

- Social Environment
  - social participation;
  - respect and social inclusion;
  - civic participation and employment;
- Physical Environment:
  - outdoor spaces and buildings;
  - transportation;
  - housing;
- Personal Well-Being
  - communication and information; and
  - community support and health services.

The public engagement for this work focused on Richmond Hill residents who are 55 and older with the understanding that those who are not yet 65 have already begun thinking about their future in Richmond Hill.

While there were a number of challenges associated with conducting a public consultation in the midst of a pandemic, a number of alternative outreach methods (including an online survey and virtual focus groups) proved effective in reaching older residents. However, it is worth noting that the COVID-19 pandemic was the backdrop for this exercise, and many participants likely considered this experience in providing their input.

The research made use of a number of information-gathering tools to solicit the stories, experiences and expectations of the City's older residents in order to paint a picture of Richmond Hill from their perspective. Well over 800 residents filled out the online survey – a significant sample size. More than 60 individuals took part in eight online or in-person focus groups.

The consultation process was launched in June 2021 to coincide with Seniors' Month. It included the online survey, which was a collaborative initiative with Richmond Hill's Planning and Infrastructure Department to gather input on the concept and implementation of Aging in Place to inform a zoning approach in the Comprehensive Zoning By-law project (ZoneRH).

The survey was promoted through social media, earned media, advertising, direct emails to individuals on the Adult 55+ Recreation and Culture database and community partners.

Several online and physically distanced in-person focus groups were held to obtain additional detail on the many issues facing an aging population.

Participants were generous with their feedback and identified their current and anticipated needs from their community in order to continue to live in Richmond Hill as they age. Their feedback is the foundation of how the City can develop an Age-Friendly Community Strategy and integrate the needs of older adults into our planning for the future.

This needs assessment offers an overview of the successes and gaps identified through the survey and focus groups, and are summarized as follows:

### **Social Environment:**

- The majority of survey respondents have frequent interactions with friends, family and neighbours, several times a week or daily. This includes participants across the 55+ age ranges.
- Respondents who were 75+ years of age were most likely to feel there were a good variety of activities for older adults at 73%.
- A significant number of respondents across all age ranges reported having access to the internet at home.
- Older adults would like to be consulted more on planning, services and other aspects of their community.
- Respondents feel that employers should be more aware of the contributions older adults can make in the workforce.

### **Physical Environment:**

- Over 99% of respondents felt that outdoor spaces (including parks, sidewalks and accessible buildings) were important to support older adult housing. Spaces should be more accessible for people who use mobility aids and consideration for benches and opportunities to rest in the shade should be included in built form design.
- In every focus group and throughout the survey responses, participants raised their concerns about the difficulty that they and their peers experience as pedestrians in relation to traffic volume, speed and safety at pedestrian crossings.
- Respondents identified the need for housing options to accommodate low-income seniors and for seniors housing to be better located in relation to transit for accessibility. Conversely, there were also comments about how seniors housing should be located away from high-traffic areas for safety, echoing comments related to the transportation.

### **Personal Well-Being:**

- Respondents were asked how they preferred to receive information on City services. The top five ranked options chosen overall were: email/e-newsletters; newsletters, notices or flyers by mail; the City's website; newspaper articles and social media.
- Respondents identified the availability of medical services in Richmond Hill as well as parks, trails and other community facilities as important to their continued mental, physical and social health, but wanted to see an all-of-government approach to supporting the needs of older adults.

## Introduction

Since 2008, most of the world's population has lived in cities. By 2030, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that three out of every five people will live in an urban area.

At the same time that cities are growing, their residents are aging and the number of older residents is increasing.

Their physical and social environments are key factors in determining whether people can remain healthy, independent and autonomous throughout their lives.

Population aging is one of the biggest social transformations in the 21st century. The United Nations has identified that between 2015 and 2050 the proportion of the world's population over 60 years will double from 12% to 22%, and is expected to total 2 billion. By 2050, older adults will have outnumbered all children under the age of 14.

Cities and communities have a key role in enabling older people to live longer and healthier lives while fostering more productive, inclusive societies.

Community support allows older people to age safely in a place that is right for them, as they continue to develop personally and contribute to their communities while retaining autonomy and health.

In light of the above, the City is beginning the process of understanding how the current environment supports our older population. The purpose of this needs assessment is to ensure that the next steps toward becoming a more Age-Friendly Community are informed by older adults themselves, their experiences, where they see successes we can build on and where they see gaps to be addressed. Developing a needs assessment with community input is a key step identified in the Province of Ontario's Creating a More Inclusive Ontario: [Age-Friendly Community Planning Guide for Municipalities and Community Organizations](#).



**“There is always room for improvement. Sending out this survey is one step towards learning how improvements can be accomplished.”**

## Age-Friendly Communities

An Age-Friendly Community supports the aging of its population to ensure that people are recognized as individuals, each with their own set of needs and wants, and who are able to continue to contribute to the community, having access to a variety of living choices.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified eight domains of livability that influence the health and wellbeing of older persons. These domains serve as the basis around which communities focus their efforts to become more age-friendly.



*How do these eight domains impact life for older adults?*

**Social participation** is strongly connected to good health and well-being throughout life. In age-friendly communities, information and opportunities are readily available for participation in local events. People over 55 who volunteer or are otherwise actively involved in their community tend to report both more and deeper relationships with others.

**Respect and social inclusion** are key elements to a positive life experience for older people from all backgrounds. Research from [Ipsos Mori and the Centre for Better Aging](#) suggests people in their 70s are more satisfied with their lives than any other age group. Even so, 60% of people over 50 years of age do not think that older people get enough respect in society and perceive a lack of consideration.

**Civic participation and employment** within an age-friendly community provides options for people in later life to make a meaningful contribution. The WHO identifies that age-friendly communities could help keep older people engaged in paid or unpaid work by improving transportation to the workplace, accessibility and increased employment flexibility.

**Outdoor spaces and public buildings** are frequently considered markers of an age-friendly community. Accessible public buildings, walkable spaces, thoughtfully-placed seating and public washrooms all contribute to an age-friendly environment.

**Transportation** is a key issue for people in later life. Private transportation can be costly and inaccessible for older adults. Public transportation may offer limited routes and inconvenient timing. As driving rates decrease with age, the need for effective transportation options becomes more apparent.

**Housing** allows older adults to age comfortably and safely within their community. When the WHO identifies appropriate housing options for those in this demographic it considers affordability, accessibility, design and layout, maintenance provisions and community integration.

**Communication and information** allows people to stay connected with events. Timely, practical information to manage life and personal needs is vital for active aging. In an age-friendly community, ensuring information is accessible to older adults involves using plain language, oral and print communication, and ensuring electronic equipment and automated services are easier to use.

**Community support and health services** are strongly connected to good health and wellbeing throughout life. Health care in age-friendly communities needs to be effective and accessible. To maintain health and independence, WHO recommends focusing on accessibility to services, home care, residential care and planning for emergencies.

## Richmond Hill at-a-Glance

In 2016, there were 55,330 adults age 55+ years living in Richmond Hill according to Census that year.

There are expected to be 84,817 adults age 55+ years living in Richmond Hill in 2041.

Between 2011 and 2016 the number of seniors (65 years and older) grew by 33.9 per cent, making this the fastest growing population group in York Region. This rate of growth was higher than that of children aged 14 years and under.

According to York Region planning projections, by 2026, it is expected that the number of seniors will be higher than the number of children in York Region for the first time.

In 2016, 35.1% of adults aged 65 to 74 years had a mortgage.

In a 2014 survey, 60% of non-retirees in York Region plan to sell their current dwelling to fund their retirement.

The overall vacancy rate for retirement home spaces in York Region was 7.0% in 2019; up from 6.0% in 2018. The vacancy rate for retirement homes in Richmond Hill remained significantly lower compared to Ontario as a whole (9.9% in 2019).

## Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities in Richmond Hill

A Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC) is an apartment complex, community, neighbourhood or housing development that was originally designed for families, but over time has come to support older adults. They are communities, not necessarily designed to accommodate a predominantly aging population, where typically at least 40% of the population is 55 years or older. A community may become a NORC in a number of different ways; for example, individuals in a specific area may have aged together as a community, or an apartment building in a walkable neighbourhood may attract older adults moving from single-family homes.

Statistics Canada has identified 27 dissemination areas that meet the definition of a Naturally Occurring Retirement Community. While a small number of these NORCs are the result of clusters of retirement homes and long-term care residences, many of these communities are simply the product of older residents gathering where they can most comfortably age in place. Some examples are the area surrounding Yonge Street south of Major Mackenzie Drive, south-east of Mill Pond Park, the an area on the east side of Yonge Street from just north of Elgin Mills, as well as an area west of Bayview, north of Sixteenth Avenue.

Sources: 2016 Census, Statistics Canada, Richmond Hill Staff Report SRCS.20.20, City of Richmond Hill Affordable Housing Strategy Background Report (March 2021).

## Richmond Hill Services for Older Adults

Richmond Hill has been proactive in preparing for the population shift described earlier through an increase in programs and services for residents who are 65 years of age or older. These programs and services include:

- 30% discount on adult registered program fees
- 30% discount on public swim and skates
- 10% discount on Richmond Hill Presents shows at RHCPA
- 50% discount on recreation facility rentals for affiliated community groups
- Free activities celebrating Seniors Month in June of each year
- Fee assistance policy to assist with recreation and culture program and membership fees
- 50% discount on pet licenses
- Free windrow snow clearing
- 35% discount on community garden plot rental fees
- Free home inspection including smoke alarm and CO alarm check
- Public education program geared toward seniors from Fire and Emergency Services
- Seniors Tax Assistance Grant Program

Also, access to a variety of seniors programs, events and services are available at reduced rates with the purchase of an annual Adult 55+ membership.

Richmond Hill offers recreation and culture programs, activities and events for residents who are 55 years of age or older at the M.L. McConaghy Seniors Centre, the Oak Ridges Community Centre and several other community centres in the City. The programs, services and events are delivered by the Recreation and Culture Division. The City has a partnership with Carefirst organization for the delivery of Adult 55+ programs at the Bayview Hill Community Centre. Participants in programming specifically offered to the Adult 55+ community are required to have an Adult 55+ membership. This membership serves more than 2,500 residents through a variety of programs. Many of its members participated in the survey and focus groups that form the core of this report.



**“We appreciate having programs for seniors at venues like the McConaghy Centre and Oak Ridges Community Centre.”**

The City’s Recreation & Culture Division continues to serve older residents through an Older Adult Programming Framework, which was most recently updated in 2018. The Strategy allows the City to continue to examine existing provision of services and identify gaps and to work closely with the public, local service providers, 55+ adults, staff and volunteers to understand the recreation needs of current and future older residents.

The City also encourages participation by older adults and works to ensure that their needs are considered in City planning efforts:

[Council's 2020-2022 Strategic Priorities](#) identify the relationship between an Age-Friendly Community and a sense of community belonging.

The City's [Affordable Housing Strategy](#) identified the need to support further diversification of the housing stock by creating a range of housing options for seniors to age in place.

Through work on the [Official Plan Update](#) and a new [Comprehensive Zoning By-law](#), input has been sought on how these important land-use planning documents can ensure we build a City that considers the needs of older adults.

Richmond Hill's [Accessibility Advisory Committee](#) gives Council advice about accessibility issues affecting residents providing guidance and advice on accessible customer service, design of public spaces, employment practices, information and communication, and general policy matters.



## Process and Approach

In setting its [Strategic Priorities 2020-2022](#), Richmond Hill City Council identified specific projects that support a Strong Sense of Belonging. Among those projects is the Age-Friendly Community Initiative, intended to enhance the City's capacity and approach to provide, design, plan, facilitate and deliver age-friendly features and approaches within the community.

### What is the purpose of a needs assessment?

To ensure that the next steps toward becoming a more Age-Friendly Community are informed by older adults themselves, their experiences, where they see successes we can build on and where they see gaps to be addressed. Developing a needs assessment with community input is a key step identified in the Province of [Ontario's Creating a More Inclusive Ontario: Age-Friendly Community Planning Guide for Municipalities and Community Organizations](#).

### Public Input – The Process

As a starting point, the public consultation used to inform this report focused on three of the eight domains: Social Participation, Work and Civic Engagement, and Communication and Information. However, the wealth of data collected quickly prompted an expansion of the scope of this report to encompass all eight domains.

The City made use of multiple channels to reach older adults to gather their input on this needs assessment, including collaborating with other public engagement activities at the City, as well as outside organizations serving age 55+ residents.

There were a number of anticipated challenges in reaching the survey's target audience (older adults) in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. An online survey was developed, which allowed us to reach more than 800 residents who are 55 years of age and older in a way that accommodated public health directives. While many older adults use online tools, accessibility concerns were covered by the design of the City of Richmond Hill website, which can offer accessible or larger-scale font and other options for those with vision issues. The survey itself was administered through Survey Monkey, which provides options to make the survey more accessible to navigate. For those seniors who were unable or uncomfortable using the internet, there was an option to complete the survey over the phone with assistance from City Recreation staff.

The opportunity to participate in consultation on this Age-Friendly Community initiative was communicated in a number of ways:

- An email invitation to the Adult 55+ Recreation and Culture database.
- Printed flyers and surveys (including large print versions) were used to invite seniors to participate in the consultation process. These were distributed through the CHATS Meals on Wheels program to seniors living in Richmond Hill.
- Paid print advertising in Ming Pao (Chinese), Nasha (Russian), The Liberal (English), SNAPd Richmond Hill (English).
- Digital advertising in Salam Toronto (Farsi)
- Radio via the Acting Mayor's monthly interview in May.
- Social media:

- Facebook boosted post – June 6, 2021 – 4,316 Post Impressions, 3,255 Post Reach, 187 Post Engagement including 11 shares, 27 link clicks, 6 comments and 81 reactions
- 13 tweets promoting participation in the survey and focus groups
- Print newsletter mailed to all Richmond Hill households in June (“Get Involved” graphic)
- E-newsletter to subscribers – July 8, 2021 edition
- Earned media:
  - The Liberal – June 17 - [Richmond Hill launches age-friendly community initiative](#) (yorkregion.com)
  - The Liberal – Aug 11 – [Is Richmond Hill age friendly? Adults 55-plus encouraged to share thoughts](#) (yorkregion.com)
- Through networks of collaborating organizations, such as the Richmond Hill Board of Trade and OnRichmondHill.
- Councillors were provided with the Age-Friendly Community graphic and link to consultation opportunities to share consultation opportunities through their resident communications and social media accounts.

With physical distancing measures eliminating the possibility of public gatherings such as roundtables or open house events, which are typically used in the consultation processes, the City was able to schedule a small number of in-person focus groups in addition to those held virtually later in the consultation process as health restrictions allowed. These were conducted with assistance from senior-focused organizations and local businesses including CHATS, Chartwell Oak Ridges Retirement Residence and the Richmond Hill Board of Trade.

In addition to the above, other efforts were made to integrate this consultation opportunity with others at the City to both expand the reach of our consultation efforts and avoid duplicative efforts.

As part of the Background Research stage for the Mill Pond Park Revitalization project, a survey was posted on the City’s website that sought input to aid the City in making decisions related to outdoor and recreation facilities, trails, natural heritage enhancement projects, and other matters related to the planned revitalization. Part of that survey focused on older (55+) residents and the results are incorporated into this document.

Several questions were also developed by the Planning and Infrastructure Department as part of their efforts to create a new Zoning By-law that reflects the modern needs of residents. That data has been used in a technical paper the City is undertaking on the concept of aging in place and how to address this concept through land use and zoning regulations as part of the ZoneRH project.

Taking advantage of the fact that so many Richmond Hill City employees have been born and raised in Richmond Hill, the City invited Richmond Hill staff to assist local older relatives in taking the survey. Several City staff provided positive feedback on the exercise.

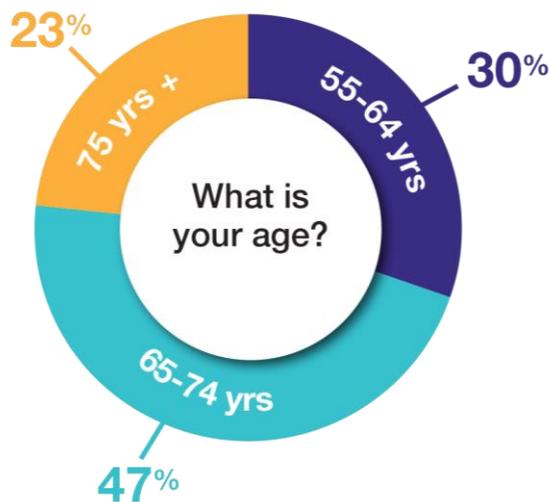
In summary, the consultation strategy consisted of multiple components which proved effective in reaching the target audience of older adults.

## Consultation Findings

The findings from the survey, conducted in June and July 2021, were used to guide the conversations in the focus groups to provide further context and understanding on the issues of concern. Focus groups were held from July to September 2021. Survey and focus group findings are included here.

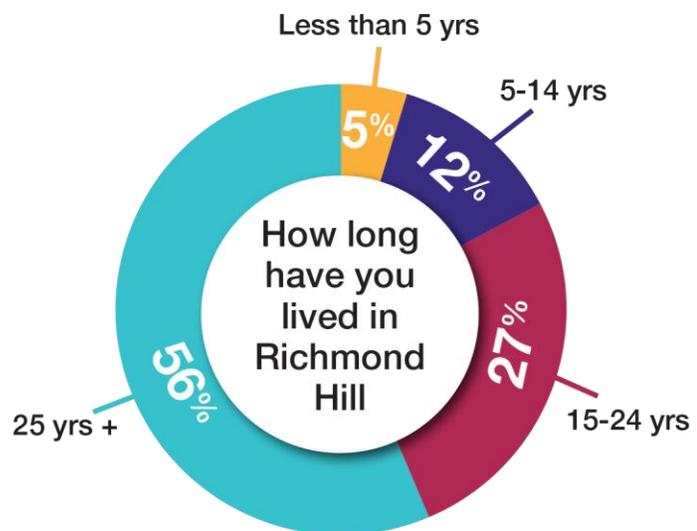
There were over 800 participants in the survey, with 767 respondents having identified as 55 years of age or older. This needs assessment focuses on the responses of the latter.

*Participants by Age Cohort, Tenure in the City and Perception of the Community as Age-Friendly*



Among survey participants, just over 30% were between the ages of 55-64. More than 46% were 65-74 years of age and 23% were 75 and older.

The majority of survey respondents have lived in Richmond Hill for more than 25 years.





\*Source: Mill Pond Revitalization Survey, June 2021

The majority of respondents rated Richmond Hill as a very good or excellent place to live as they age.

Where respondents included a comment, many cited municipal programming, such as recreation, events and parks, as well as community services and amenities such as hospitals and medical clinics, religious places/groups and shopping as important as they age and noted their proximity to these services and amenities in Richmond Hill. Areas for improvement were also identified, such as traffic and pedestrian safety, public transit, accessibility, housing options and affordability. This feedback was repeated in responses to later questions as well, as discussed further on in this assessment.

In order to gather additional feedback to inform this needs assessment, participants in a Mill Pond Revitalization survey conducted by the Planning and Infrastructure Department in summer 2021 were also asked to rate how they perceive Richmond Hill as a place for people to live as they age. The Mill Pond survey included respondents of all ages and not just those 55+ years. The results showed a higher percentage of respondents who rated the City as an excellent or very good place to live as they age.



“I love Richmond Hill because I feel safe living here. For now I live at home but I fear for the years ahead when I would need support.”

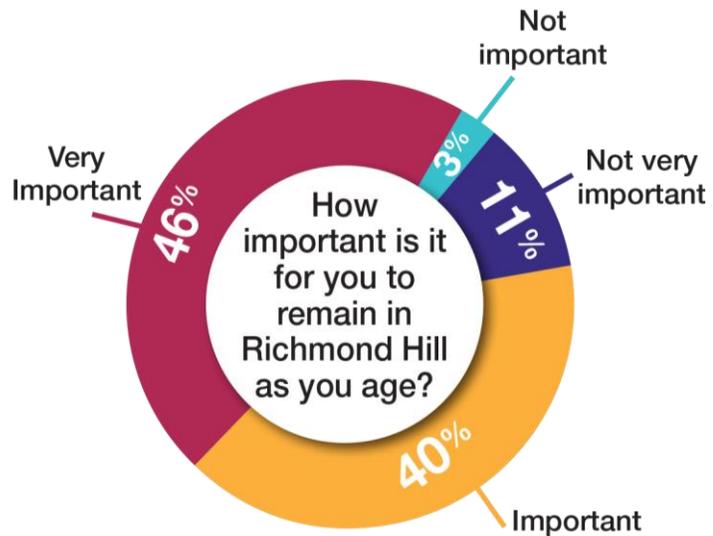
Participants in both the Age-Friendly Community Survey and focus groups felt strongly that Richmond Hill should continue to be their home as they age, with over 85% of survey respondents saying it is very important or important overall and ranging from 81% to 88% among the subgroups of 55-64 years of age, 64-74 years of age and 75 and older.

Their friends, neighbours and nearby services and amenities play a role in their satisfaction in where they are located, as evidenced through comments such as:

“My neighbourhood is friendly, caring and we look out for each other. We have similar values and care about our overall neighbourhood, not just about each other. We have set up programs whereby we feel safe (Neighbourhood Watch, a Residents Group,) and we know of other programs that we can report to if we need to.”

“I’ve been here just over 20 years and the infrastructure has grown from town to city. Everything is available here now. No real need to go downtown for things.”

“At age 65 I have everything I need to be happy. My doctor’s office is close by, plenty of grocery stores, people are friendly, and my dentist is close by.”

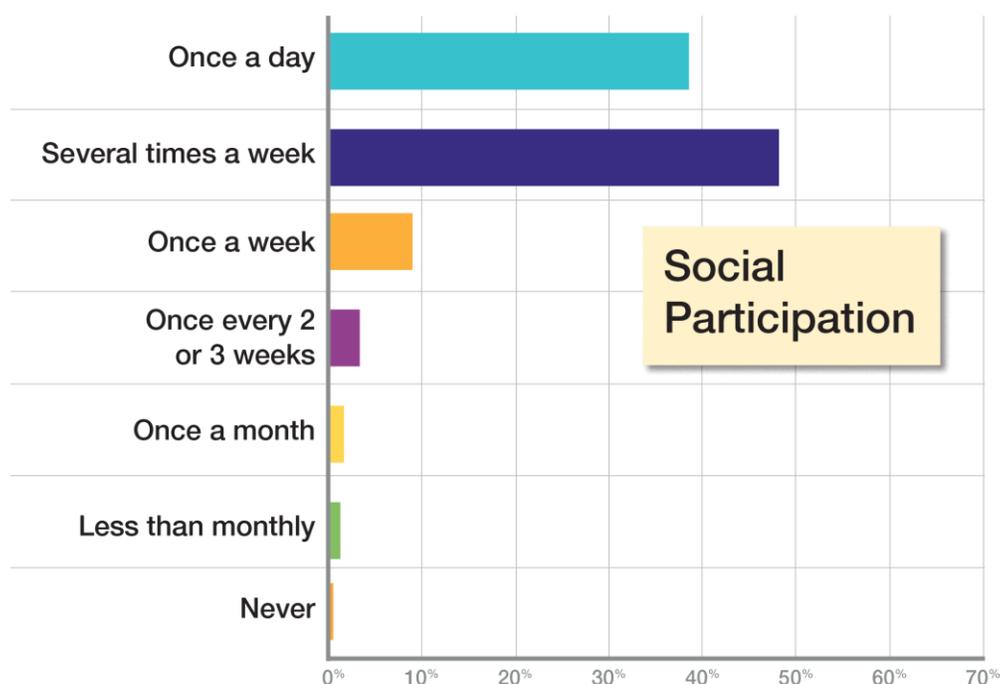


## Social Environment

### Domain: Social Participation

The first Age-Friendly Community domain on which the consultation process focused on was Social Participation. This domain is about ensuring there are opportunities to develop new social networks as well as to maintain existing ones as we age. This represents one way of understanding the level of interaction that older adults have with other members of their community, and the extent that the community makes this interaction and inclusion possible.

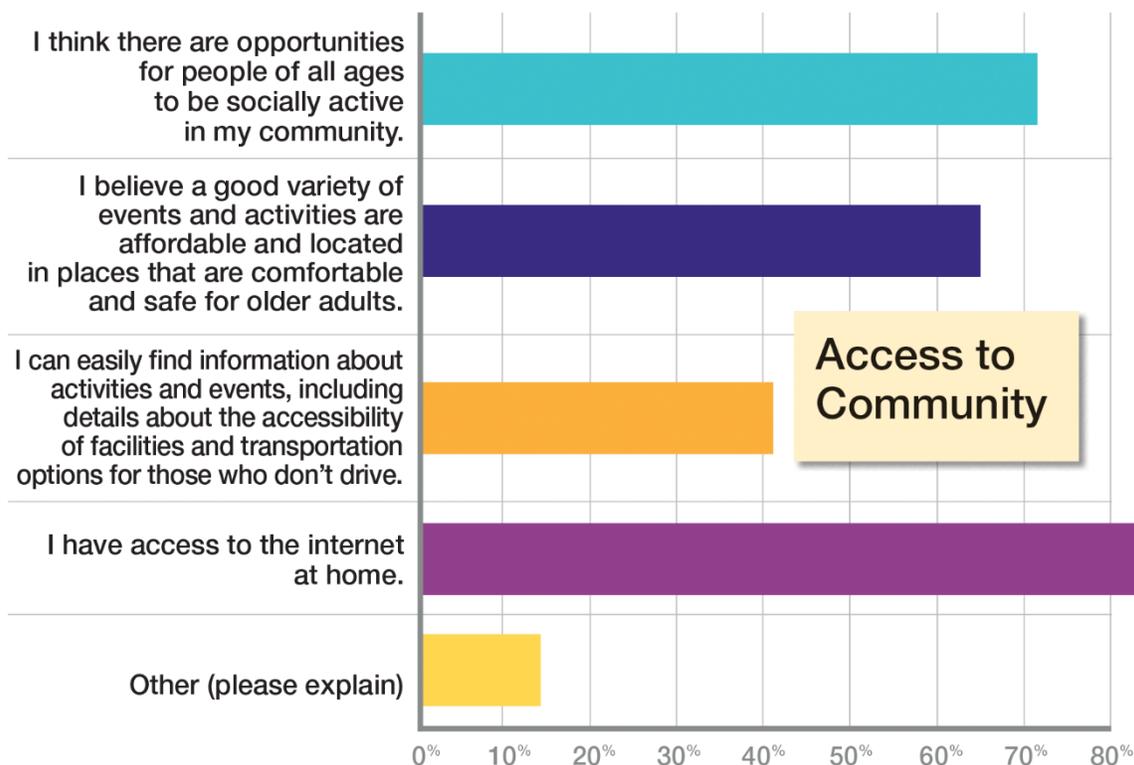
Survey participants were asked: “Thinking about what life was like before the pandemic began, how frequently would you interact with your friends, family or neighbours (on the phone, in person, over email or through social media?)”



The majority of survey respondents overall have frequent interactions with friends, family and neighbours, several times a week or daily. This was also the case across all subgroups of age of survey participants.

Where the consultation was able to foster more in-depth discussion, at the focus groups, participants often expressed concern for other older residents who may be isolated to assess their health and to ensure they are aware of various programs and services that are available to them.

The survey also asked, “We’d like to learn more about your experiences living in Richmond Hill. Thinking about what life was like before the pandemic, please check all that apply.” This question was intended to gather information about what community attributes are most useful to older adults and where there may be gaps which can be addressed to make Richmond Hill more age-friendly.



Feedback from the “other” response included: the desire to have the options identified more readily available; increased accessibility for older adults who don’t drive; park amenities geared to seniors; social options geared to older adults not yet of retirement age, or that it was difficult to evaluate given the pandemic requirements in place at the time of the survey.

The differences between the 55-64, 65-74 and 75+ years old categories of respondents were not significant with one exception. Respondents who were 75+ years of age were most likely to feel there were a good variety of activities for older adults at 73%, while this was 64% for those 65-74, and 59% for those 55-64 years of age.

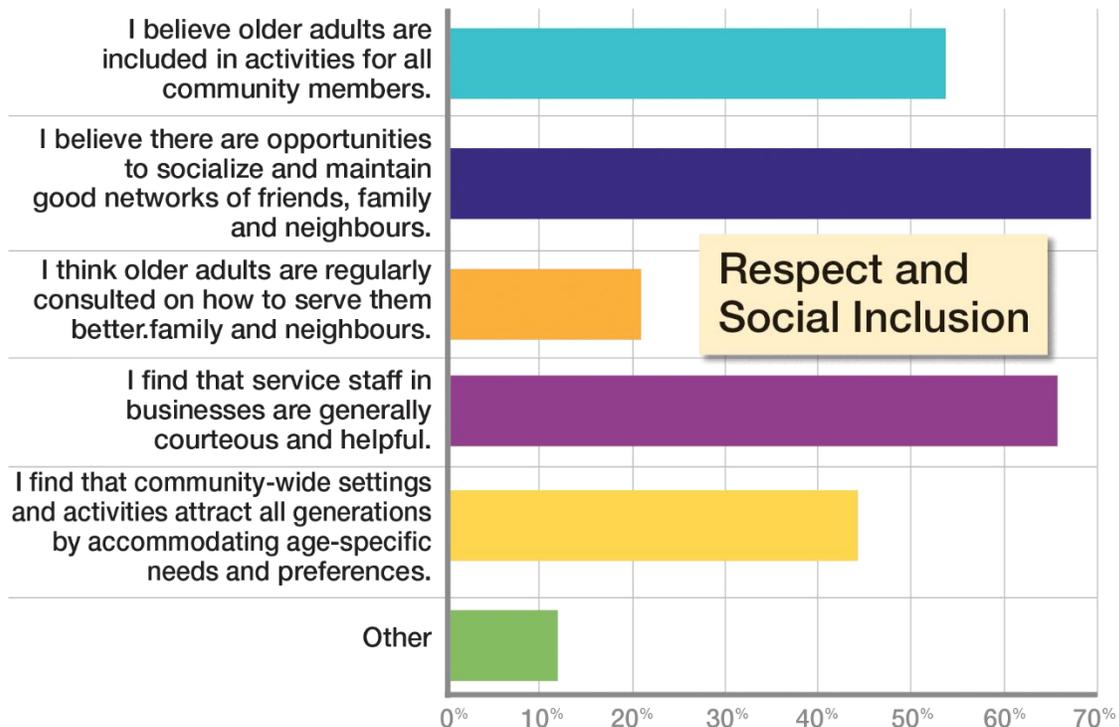
Of particular note is that a significant number of respondents across the age range reported having access to the internet at home. As of 2016, Statistics Canada found about 68% of Canadian seniors made use of the Internet although that percentage drops with older users ([Evolving Internet Use Among Canadian Seniors](#), Statistics Canada).

The survey attempted to correct for responses that favoured those participants with online access by offering paper copies as well as the ability for participants to complete the survey over the phone (these results were later input into the online survey for documentation purposes by City staff or volunteers from service organizations). Despite this, 81% of those 75 and older

reported having access to the internet at home, increasing to 86% among those 55-64 years of age. This would seem to indicate that common assumptions that older adults are not online do not necessarily hold true for those in Richmond Hill.

**Domain: Respect and Social Inclusion**

In an effort to understand the needs of the older adult community associated with the domain of respect and social inclusion, the Age-Friendly Community survey asked participants to identify statements they agreed with based on a pre-populated list.



This pattern of response was consistent among all age cohorts (55-64, 65-74, 75+) who participated in the survey.

Of those who chose “other,” there was a common response that while efforts were being made to include older adults, there was opportunity for improvement, specifically in increasing consultation with older adults when planning for services and the community. Respondents cited this not only in municipal programming but also in community organizations and businesses. Many participants noted how much they missed events that had been suspended because of pandemic health restrictions at City facilities and looked forward to their return.

Most focus group participants indicated they had been able to maintain contact with friends and family throughout the pandemic as supported by responses highlighted in questions around this

theme. Their was concern about older adults, who by reasons of physical isolation, poverty, technical limitations (or all three) might find themselves without essential support services and the need for this to be addressed. Some comments included:

"Isolation is a reality of aging in place. People that are not mobile or have access to the internet suffer greatly."

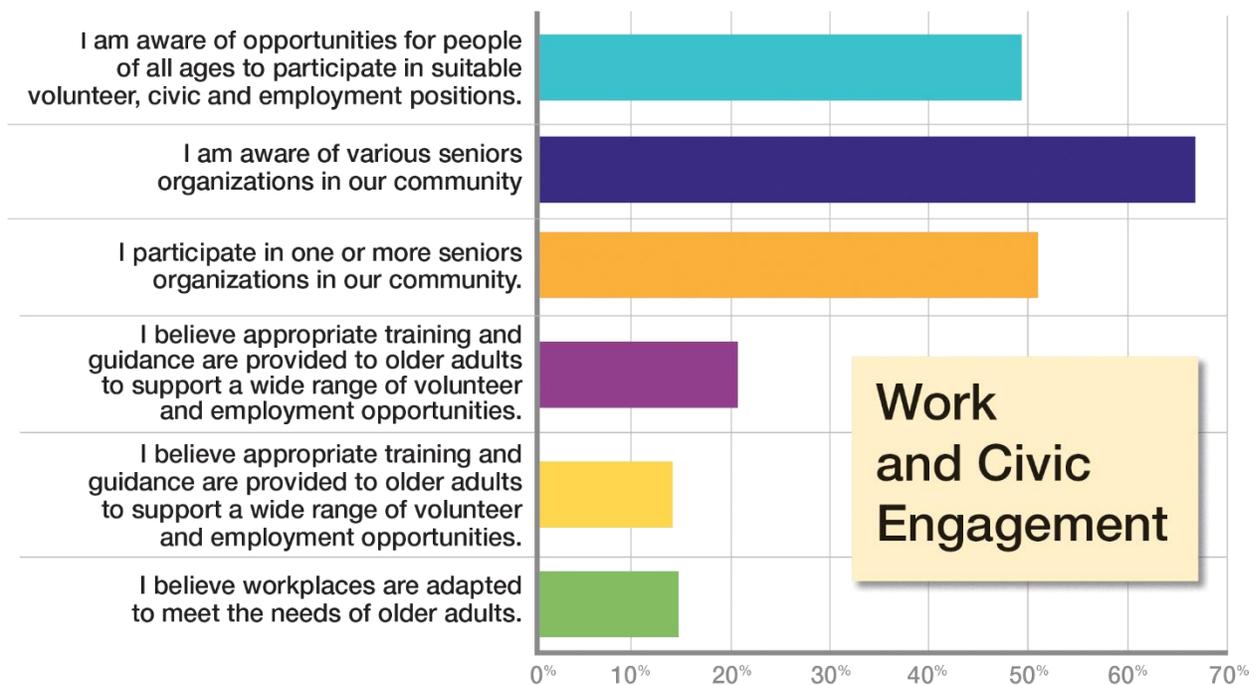
"Many seniors begin to look for community when they are alone but this can also be a challenging situation, engaging with new people and activities on their own."

"I was thinking of some older friends of mine, and the depression that they have faced. I feel it will persist beyond COVID because they have mobility issues. Even though they're in condos, they're still isolated within the condos."

**Domain: Work and Civic Engagement**

Survey participants were quick to point out the different experiences of age cohorts within the 55+ years of age category. Many respondents said they were still in the workforce, either full or part-time. For those who have the time and interest, volunteering remains a key component of an active lifestyle. Respondents felt that they represent a significant resource in the city and are eager to embrace inter-generational opportunities that will keep them connected with the larger community.

Thinking about what community life was like before the pandemic, please check all that apply.



There was a striking similarity among respondents across all age cohorts. The top three and bottom three options cleaved together consistently: respondents were aware of seniors' organizations, participated in them and were aware of volunteer, civic and employment opportunities. However, there was a notable gap between these, and those options chosen least frequently, indicating there is a need for training and guidance to support volunteer and work opportunities, a greater awareness among local employers of the value of older adult workers and correspondingly, that workplaces should be more adapted to the needs of older adult workers.

Below are some of the comments that highlighted these findings:

"Our vibrant energetic seniors want to do more than the usual volunteering - this survey is a good idea but make sure you think outside the box to what will come from it. Offer seniors the opportunity to put their thoughts and suggestions to work in a concrete way."

"Older adults are "invisible" and rather ignored by service staff in businesses."

"I don't think employers give older adults a chance to work. I'm 60 years old and have a hard time finding a job. Sixty isn't old. I took early retirement at 56. I just want a part-time job and no one gives me that opportunity. They just want teenagers or 20 somethings. Some teenagers aren't co-operative and only stay on the job until something better comes around."

"Need increased awareness of volunteer opportunities for seniors. Seniors should be linked with children's programs so that each age group can benefit from the other."



## Physical Environment

### *Domain: Housing*

For the domain of housing, many respondents highlighted affordability as a concern, not just for themselves as older adults but for younger generations as well. There were several comments about the need for more housing options to accommodate low-income seniors and for seniors housing to be better located in relation to transit for accessibility. Conversely, there were also comments about how seniors housing should be located away from high-traffic areas for safety, echoing comments related to the transportation. Some respondents mentioned opportunities for examining alternative options like co-housing initiatives or multi-generational housing. There was awareness that as older adults' needs change they will need other housing options.

Respondents also recognized the impact of traditional suburban housing on distances to amenities and therefore the walkability of the City, while at the same time intensification brought challenges for pedestrians, as identified earlier.

Of note, the Age-Friendly Community Survey was conducted in collaboration with consultation on the ZoneRH project in support of a new Comprehensive Zoning By-law. One of the questions they asked was whether respondents felt they could comfortably continue to live in Richmond Hill. Of the respondents 55 years of age and older over 87% felt they could continue to live in Richmond Hill as they aged, yet many of the comments expressed reservations about this indicating it may be a hope rather than a certainty for them, citing accessibility, and affordable support services for health and home maintenance.

The following comments highlight some of the main themes of the feedback on housing:

“Want to try to stay in our home in our community.”

“Need to live where have care. Location is secondary.”

"Need more affordable accessible living options. More affordable detached one floor dwellings or 2 family dwellings to accommodate elderly living comfortably with family."

“Lack of affordable rental units for seniors on fixed incomes.”

“Right now I am comfortable living in my current home, and would like to do so as long as I can, but with a fixed senior's income and the increased food prices and cost of living especially since the pandemic, I am concerned that this will become more difficult. The cost of alternative housing in Richmond Hill is very high. I do not want to end up in a long term care facility which is not cheap either.”

### ***Domain: Transportation***

Transportation and Housing are areas of shared jurisdiction in the public sector. The results of the survey and focus groups in these domains, some of which overlap with domains discussed earlier, reflect the holistic view of the participants, and not simply where the City of Richmond Hill has authority.

In every focus group and throughout the survey responses, participants raised their concerns about the difficulty that they and their peers experience as pedestrians in relation to traffic volume, speed and safety at pedestrian crossings. A large number of respondents noted that 'walk' signals were not long enough for them to cross safely. There were also a significant number of comments about the negative impacts of increasing traffic congestion.

Several respondents commented that transit is accessible, while many others disagreed and noted that transit stops were too far apart, and buses and trains too infrequent. These differing perceptions may have been related to what part of the City respondents lived or worked in. The need for age-friendly public transit that is convenient, comfortable, safe and affordable was frequently cited as an important consideration for the future.

Despite the survey having been conducted in the summer, a small number of respondents commented on snow clearance. There was general agreement that it was done well, but needed improvement, specifically for pedestrians.

The following comments represent the main themes of the feedback on transportation:

“As walking becomes more difficult and traffic more daunting, it is tougher to get around in town and everything is far away (e.g. doctors, banks, etc.).”

"My concern is sometimes the traffic lights are so short that if you don't really hurry, you can't get across the street. And if you're cycling you've got to be really careful."

“I think one of the key things is transportation. I don't drive. And so I rely on walking, and I rely on transit. There are no east-west connections that are timely.”

"All year round traffic moves beyond the speed limit. In the winter it is often impossible to walk the sidewalks because they are not clear."

**Domain: Outdoors spaces and Public Buildings**

Age-Friendly Community survey respondents were concerned about accessibility of public buildings, specifically the Main Municipal Offices at East Beaver Creek, noting that these are located distant to most residences.

There were many responses that highlighted the value of Richmond Hill’s outdoor spaces for older adults as they age. Parks, trails and other community facilities were identified as important to residents’ continued mental, physical and social health. Participants shared the need for walking paths that supported stability of users and suitable for those using mobility aids. The City was encouraged to consider more rest areas, such as benches, to allow older adults to enjoy the outdoors but at their individual pace. Over 99% of respondents felt that outdoor spaces (including parks, sidewalks and accessible buildings) were important to support older adult housing.

Participants both appreciated existing facilities and called for more outdoor spaces that suited residents as they age:

“Promote all ages to come together for recreation, picnics, activities, more connected safe bike trails or paths, outdoor pickle ball courts. Rejuvenation of downtown core with outdoor patios”

“I like to be outdoors and parks need to be larger with more than just children’s play equipment. There are a lot of seniors in my area.”

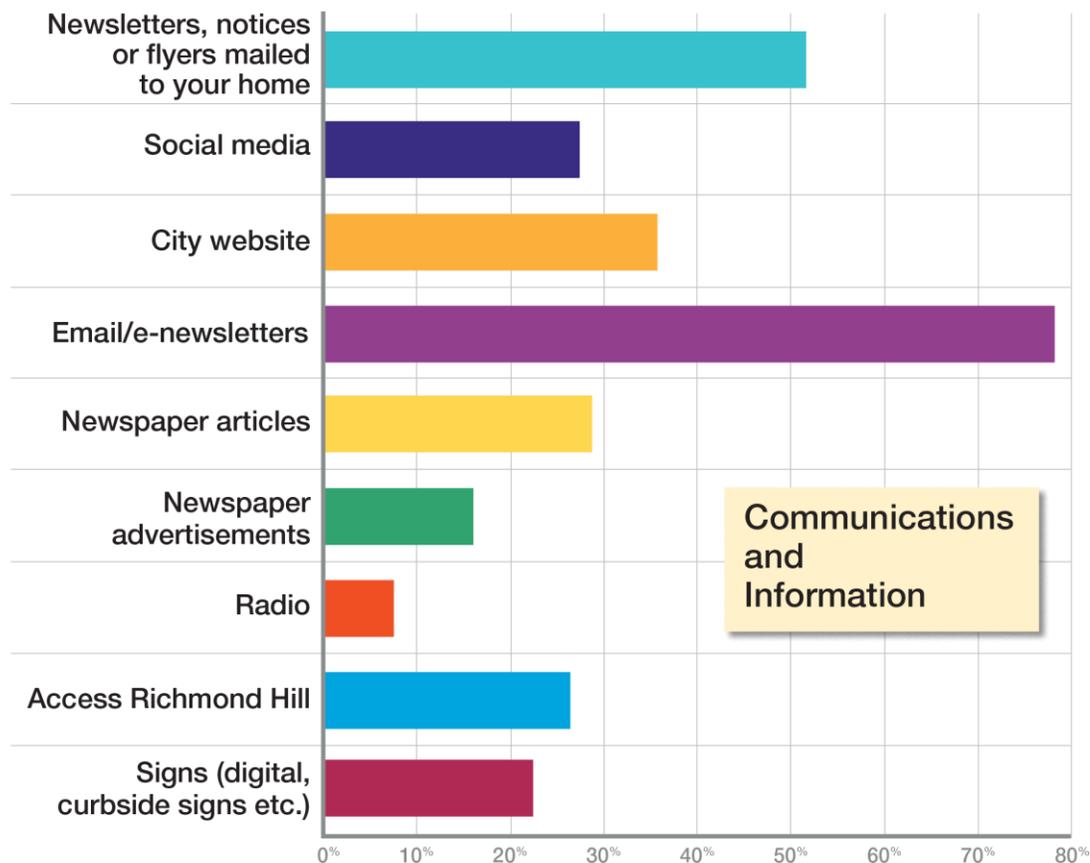
“Parks, trails, benches in pretty and shady areas, cafes, interlinking walking paths to retail services.”



## Personal Well-Being

### Domain: Communication and Information

The Age-Friendly Community Survey asked respondents to share what ways they prefer to receive information from the City about services, programs and events. They were permitted to select up to 5 options, from a list developed in consultation with the City's Strategic Communications staff.



The top five ranked options chosen overall were: email/e-newsletters; newsletters, notices or flyers by mail; the City's website; newspaper articles and social media. Looking at the breakdown of responses by sub categories of age, responses were consistent in terms of the top five choices, with number one and two as email/e-newsletters and newsletters, notices and flyers top two for each age group. Social media was only in the top 5 for the 55-64 years of age group.

From the results of the survey on social participation (described earlier), we know that 84% of overall respondents to the Age-Friendly Community Survey have access to the internet at home.

While focus group participants appreciated receiving information about events, programs and services in off-line ways, the overall feedback indicates that an assumption that older adults are not online may be unfounded; that like the overall population, older adults can be effectively reached through a number of channels, including online ones.

**Domain: Community Support and Health**

There were a considerable number of comments on community support and health by participants in the survey as well as in focus groups. As outlined in the previous sections on transportation and housing, accessibility to affordable community support and health services play a key part of how older adults may think about where they live and how they get around.

A number of survey participants identified the availability of medical services in Richmond Hill, including Mackenzie Health Hospital. They further highlighted parks, trails and other community facilities as important to their continued mental, physical and social health.

Many respondents felt all levels of government need to do more to help older residents successfully and safely age in place. They expressed concern for themselves as they grow older, as well as for their neighbours who may already be slipping through the social safety net.

The following comments highlight some of the main themes from the consultation related to community support and health:

“A lot of recreational and physical activities are easily available to seniors who can remain healthy and free of illnesses by accessing these activities.”

"All of these "support services" to help people remain in their homes or live in independent or assisted living or long-term care need to be affordable, subsidized and monitored and held accountable."

"Older adults' needs may change over time due to their health and medical conditions. Certain programs and activities may need to be reviewed and adjusted to accommodate those seniors so they don't feel excluded from participating."

“I think our facilities, while they are absolutely gorgeous and we have beautiful libraries, let's say they are few and far between and they are not walkable for many reasons. And also they are not co-located. For seniors being able to go to one place and do multiple things really makes a big difference.”

As part of the Age-Friendly Community consultation, the City co-hosted a specific focus group involving businesses that serve the older adult market with the Richmond Hill Board of Trade. Participants in this focus group emphasized what they had observed among their senior clientele, including isolation and the accessibility and affordability of services. Several participants suggested they would be interested in being part of a larger network of service providers. They also acknowledged that offering discount programs and other financial incentives would make it significantly easier for residents on a fixed income to obtain more than just the necessities of life.

## Looking Forward

This needs assessment is a first step in a journey to make the City of Richmond Hill a more Age-Friendly Community. Based on best practices, this information can be used to inform next steps toward that goal.

Richmond Hill Council has funded the creation of an Age-Friendly Community Strategy as part of the 2022 Operating Budget. This work is expected to begin in Fall 2022, with a key input being this needs assessment document.

In the meantime, there are a number of concurrent efforts on issues identified in this needs assessment that are under review at the City, including:

- An Official Plan Update, Comprehensive Zoning By-law and the implementation of an Affordable Housing Strategy that will help inform the future of Richmond Hill with respect to the built environment and housing.
- A Transportation Master Plan to inform the future of transportation and transit in Richmond Hill for the years to come.
- A review of the Parks, Recreation and Culture Plans that to guide parks, recreation and culture needs to 2031.

These and other processes will be able to rely on this needs assessment and the future Age-Friendly Community Strategy to help ensure we are building a community where residents can age in place, and support older adults now and in the future.

This needs assessment is being presented to Council for endorsement at its May 25, 2022 meeting. In concert with this endorsement, Council will be able to consider a number of follow up actions that, along with the Age-Friendly Community Strategy that is to be developed based on this needs assessment, continue the City's journey to becoming more age-friendly.



“I have lived in Richmond Hill since 1985. From the very beginning, I was made welcome. When I moved here, there were approximately 37,000 people. The municipal support has grown with the needs of the population.”