



# Building Healthy Communities For Active Aging Awards 2008



AGING  
Initiative  
*Protecting the Health  
of Older Americans*

# About the Award

**T**he principal goal of the Building Healthy Communities for Active Aging Award program is to raise awareness across the nation about healthy synergies that can be achieved when communities combine and implement the principles of smart growth with the concepts of active aging.

Awards are presented to communities demonstrating the best and most inclusive overall implementation of smart growth and active aging at the neighborhood, municipal, tribal, county, and regional levels. Applicants are evaluated based on the overall effectiveness of their programs, level of community involvement and outreach, use of innovative approaches, and overall environmental and health benefits of the project.



Individuals and the community benefit when people of all ages engage in an active lifestyle.

There are two types of awards—the Achievement Award and the Commitment Award. The Achievement Award winners demonstrate excellence in building healthy communities for active aging. These recipients have implemented programs and policies that improve the health and well-being of the community and its citizens. The Commitment Award recognizes communities that are planning for and beginning to integrate smart growth and active aging.

Cover photo courtesy of Project for Public Spaces, [www.pps.org](http://www.pps.org).

# Building Healthy Communities For Active Aging

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# Achievement Award Winner

## Bureaus of Portland Parks & Recreation and Transportation

### Oregon

"The actual strolls through Portland neighborhoods were a worthwhile and beneficial activity, which I wouldn't have undertaken on my own."

– Sonia Quezada, resident

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Long considered a national leader in smart growth design, the City of Portland is using active aging programs to integrate older adults into its communities. Since the 1980s, Portland has been building compact neighborhoods and placing homes, businesses, services, and recreational opportunities within walking distance. These neighborhood centers are connected by nearly 2,500 miles of sidewalks, a sophisticated transit system, and a bike network of more than 270 miles of lanes, paths, and boulevards. To encourage older adults to use this infrastructure and promote active living, the City's Parks & Recreation and Bureau of Transportation developed the Senior Strolls and Senior Bike programs. The bike program, now run by Portland Parks & Recreation, offers training on free, comfortable, stable recumbent tricycles and provides helmets for all participants. Portland Parks & Recreation also offers graduates of the walking program the option to move on to progressive, three-level hiking programs, which can lead to wilderness hikes, in addition to many other recreational activities.

Portland's program to build strength and confidence in walking and cycling is working. Of the 300 people who have participated in the Senior Strolls program since 2005, 53 percent say they walk more and 71 percent report they have replaced at least one driving trip with a walking trip. The biking classes are consistently full.

Creating opportunities for active aging is one reason Portland was recently named by AARP Magazine as one of the nation's top five cities for older adults and retirees.



The Senior Bike program fosters active living for older adults who enjoy the extensive bike lane network.

# Commitment Award Winner

Since 2005, Casper has been developing a plan to encourage active aging. The City established the Senior Study Committee to determine the needs of its aging population. The Committee analyzed local data, reviewed survey and focus group findings and identified gaps in services including the need for an improved infrastructure to improve walking and the need to build a variety of housing options.

Casper has begun to implement the recommendations. A study was conducted of the walking environment and as a result, sidewalks with curb ramps are being installed along major streets. Future sidewalk investments will be driven by active aging considerations. Casper also is considering amending zoning and development codes to expand the development of a variety of housing types that may be attractive to older adults, including assisted living facilities, board and care homes, shared housing, and accessory dwelling units.



Classes specifically designed for older adults provide opportunities for social interaction as well as fitness. Photo courtesy of Jen Haines.

Casper is focusing on the needs of its older population as it redevelops the Old Yellowstone District by encouraging development of diverse housing types within walking distance of shops and services. Additionally, Casper is expanding its senior center to accommodate more seniors. With these actions Casper is taking steps to meet the needs of older adults and the wave of aging baby boomers.

City of  
Casper

Wyoming

“Exercise and fresh air are very important to us in our retirement years. We enjoy using the extensive trail system in order to accomplish our goal of a healthy lifestyle.”

– Shirley and Michael Lee, residents

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# Commitment Award Winner

## City of Iowa City

### Iowa

“The City’s efforts help make this community a wonderful place to stay active as we grow up and grow old.”

– Reverend Bob Welsh,  
Johnson County Livable  
Community for Successful  
Aging Policy Board,  
Johnson County Task  
Force on Aging

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Iowa City, working with the Johnson County Livable Community for Successful Aging Policy Board, analyzed the community’s needs for active aging and responded with a variety of policies and programs to encourage physical activity among older adults. Its research found that walking was the primary activity for 90 percent of those who regularly exercised. At the same time, many of Iowa City’s older adults do not live within walking distance of stores, services, and other needs. The automobile-oriented design of shopping areas outside of downtown do not encourage walking as part of daily activity.

The City has adopted a variety of policies to improve the walking environment. A revised zoning code encourages commercial zones throughout the City that combine housing, shops, parkland, and services to make walking a viable choice for conducting daily errands. A new complete streets policy requires all streets to be designed to accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists, as well as cars. New subdivision codes require streets to connect, reducing dead ends and shortening distances residents need to travel.

The Iowa City/Johnson County Senior Center provides a variety of dance, yoga, tai chi, and fitness classes to complement seniors’ walking routines. There is also a drill team that marches in the University of Iowa homecoming parade.

A great place for older adults to live, Iowa City has laid the groundwork for a more active lifestyle among its fast growing older adult population.



Improving sidewalk and trail connectivity encourages walking groups, such as the Trailblazers, to exercise outdoors. Photo courtesy of Emily Light.

# Commitment Award Winner

Satellite Beach is transforming itself to meet the needs of its growing aging population. By increasing the number of sidewalks, creating new parks, and rezoning its commercial strips into walkable town centers with homes, stores, and services, the City has begun to create a place where residents can choose to walk or bike as part of their daily activities. Within this newly zoned district, the City has invested in the redevelopment of an old shopping center, creating a civic center and gymnasium with expanded physical activity classes including yoga, dance, and aerobics.

Public views and access to the water are extremely important to encouraging physical activity. Satellite Beach has invested in oceanfront parkland. It

also refurbished two waterfront parks and disability access points to the beach. About 40 percent of waterfront property is under public ownership and City management is enhancing opportunities to enjoy the beach.



Older adults ensured that persons of all abilities had access to parks and the beach for exercise. Photo courtesy of Dominick Montanaro.

The transformation of Satellite Beach is driven by older adult participation in the community. The City actively engages older residents in volunteer opportunities, such as school crossing guards, “Citizens on Patrol” with the police department, or the “Neighbor-helping-Neighbor” program (senior volunteers assist neighbors by providing transportation and helping with yard work or repair projects). This year, seniors represent nearly 87 percent of City volunteers and volunteered almost 4,000 hours. Satellite Beach has created a positive and enriching environment for its growing aging population.

## City of Satellite Beach

### Florida

“The audible crossing signal on SR A1A lets me safely go to restaurants, stores, and supermarkets by myself. This enables me to live independently in my community.”

– Eugene Medvec,  
resident

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# BHCAA Winner Updates

## Atlanta Regional Commission Georgia

### 2007 Achievement Award Winner

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The Atlanta Regional Commission's (ARC) Lifelong Communities Initiative has been working with the counties and cities in the metropolitan region to prepare for the growing older adult population by developing priorities, policies, and programs that support three goals: promoting housing and transportation options, encouraging healthy lifestyles, and expanding information and access to services.

Over the last year, ARC and its partners have made significant progress toward all three goals. Accomplishments include: passage of several zoning ordinances that encourage a diverse housing stock, integration of transportation needs into local comprehensive plans, and a program to train older adults how to advocate for changes to zoning codes and regulations regarding the built environment. Six of the county and city teams have formed preventive health collaboratives, finding new ways to deliver flu shots, pneumonia vaccines, mammograms, and monitor glucose and cholesterol levels. ARC is working in one community to develop a more pedestrian- and elder-friendly downtown. The Lifelong Communities Initiative has been able to bolster existing and initiate new walking clubs, helping more older adults increase their physical activity.

ARC is planning a multiday charrette for February 2009, during which participants will develop designs for six sites that incorporate mixed use, mixed income housing options, connection to surrounding neighborhoods, and walkable environments to insure that people of all ages, but particularly older adults, can live in the communities as long as possible.

The Mayor's leadership encourages Atlantans to be active.  
Photo courtesy of the Atlanta Regional Commission.



# BHCAA Winner Updates

Kirkland continues to build on its accomplishments by improving its programs and infrastructure to support active aging. To publicize the PedFlag program, the Kirkland Senior Council and the Kirkland Steppers, a senior walking group, produced a pedestrian safety video, *Excel as a Pedestrian*, which highlights the importance of using the flags for safe road crossing. As part of Kirkland's \$6 million pledge to encourage walking and biking, the City's revised non-motorized transportation plan includes 28 new sidewalk projects and 25 new bike lane projects.

Kirkland named affordable housing as a top priority in the City's transit-oriented developments, creating more opportunities for seniors to live in and around these developments. Kirkland is exploring options to revise its comprehensive land use plan and rezoning that would allow the City to transform the underutilized South Kirkland Park & Ride lot into a transit-oriented hub that incorporates affordable housing, shops, and offices. In compliance with the City's Complete Streets Ordinance, the site will encourage the use of alternative transportation, such as transit, walking, and biking. Older adults living in or near the South Kirkland transit-oriented hub stand to benefit from the addition of local amenities and pedestrian-friendly walkways, which will be part of this development.

With Kirkland's holistic development approach that embraces walkable communities, affordable housing, and transit-oriented development, the City is not only practicing smart growth, it also is ensuring ongoing capabilities for active aging and healthy lifestyles.

The Kirkland Steppers encourage an active lifestyle for seniors of all physical abilities. Photo courtesy of City of Kirkland.

## City of Kirkland Washington

### 2007 Achievement Award Winner

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# BHCAA Winner Updates

## City of Rogers Arkansas

2007 Commitment  
Award Winner

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The Adult Wellness Center in Rogers, Arkansas recently completed construction of a Wellness Garden. The Wellness Garden, located directly behind the Center, provides visitors and residents of the adjacent senior housing complex an opportunity for outdoor physical activity and connects pedestrians with the surrounding community. The Wellness Garden features a rubberized walking trail as well as balance, strengthening, stretching, and exercise stations. The entire Wellness Garden is handicapped accessible.

The Garden also includes a meditation garden with a labyrinth, a rock and water garden teeming with fish and water plants, a demonstration garden with raised handicap accessible planter beds, a "4 Seasons Garden" designed and maintained by volunteers, a bird and butterfly sanctuary, a gazebo, a picnic area, and a recreational lawn panel.

Trails extending from the Garden lead to senior housing and retail shops, and eventually will connect into the City's master trail system, making walking a viable option to and from the Wellness Center and nearby senior housing.



The Wellness Garden encourages persons of all abilities to get active and enjoy the outdoors. Photo courtesy of Don Farmer.

# What is Smart Growth?

The built environment—places where we live, work, and play—impacts people of all ages. Housing and transportation opportunities shape our environment and have longstanding consequences on our daily lives and the quality of our environment. Smart growth strives to minimize the impacts of

our built environments both on 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 varying age, income level, and physical ability a range of safe, affordable, and convenient choices in where to live and how to get around.



Different color paving illustrates safe walking areas in commercial sidewalks. Location: Bethesda, Md. Photo courtesy of EPA Smart Growth.

Growing smart helps to reduce our ecological footprint and preserve natural resources and open space.

**For more information, please visit...**

**[www.epa.gov/smartgrowth](http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth)**

## Smart Growth Principles

1. Mix land uses.
2. Take advantage of compact building design.
3. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices.
4. Create walkable neighborhoods.
5. Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.
6. Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas.
7. Strengthen and direct development toward existing communities.
8. Provide a variety of transportation choices.
9. Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective.
10. Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions.

# What is Active Aging?

By 2030, the number of older persons in the United States is expected to double to more than 70 million. As our population ages, a growing number of us will be living with chronic conditions, placing increased pressure on our health care system. Only 20 percent of those over the age of 65 participate in regular activity, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Many older adults live with at least one chronic condition. Research demonstrates that daily physical activity is vital for keeping fit and controlling chronic conditions. Creating a walkable community is one of the principles of smart growth that fosters active aging.



Physical activities, such as biking, can improve the quality of life for older adults. Location: Cambridge, Mass. Photo courtesy of Julianne Sammut.

Active aging strives to promote strategies that engage older adults through a variety of structured and unstructured physical activities including walking and biking. Communities can promote active aging by implementing a diverse array of accessible physical-activity programs, increasing the accessibility of opportunities for self-directed physical activity for those 50 years of age or older, and providing a safe, walkable environment.

**For more information on active aging, please visit...**

Learning Network for Active Aging:  
[www.LNactiveaging.org](http://www.LNactiveaging.org)

National Council on Aging's Center for Healthy Aging:  
[www.healthyagingprograms.org](http://www.healthyagingprograms.org)

National Blueprint Initiative: [www.agingblueprint.org](http://www.agingblueprint.org)

# Connecting Smart Growth and Active Aging

By adopting smart growth principles, communities can design places that increase mobility and improve quality of life for older adults. Neighborhoods that integrate homes, shops, and services, as well as parks and recreational facilities, allow residents, especially older adults, to pursue an interesting and active life without depending on a car.

Properly designed sidewalks and bikeways allow older residents to walk and bike to doctors' offices, businesses, and local shops. Transit provides access to places that are further away. These everyday activities promote physical fitness. Across the nation, the average transit rider walks or bikes 20 minutes a day as part of using transit, meeting two thirds of his or her daily needs for physical activity.

The benefits of building healthy communities for active aging are being realized in communities across the country. For example, the City of Saratoga Springs, New York has created a mix of housing opportunities near the Saratoga Senior Center and medical facilities. By living near key amenities, older residents may choose to walk rather than drive.

Smart land use planning that incorporates smart growth principles by modifying the built environment can lead to a supportive environment for active aging.



Providing a range of housing choices allows residents to remain in their neighborhood as their housing needs change. Location: Arlington, Va. Photo courtesy of EPA Smart Growth.

# Announcing the 2009 Awards for Building Healthy Communities for Active Aging

EPA's Aging Initiative announces the 3<sup>rd</sup> annual **Building Healthy Communities for Active Aging Awards** program. The awards recognize outstanding community planning and strategies that support active aging. Winners will be announced in spring 2010. **Applications are due July 17, 2009.** Applications, award guidelines, and entry rules can be found at [www.epa.gov/aging/bhc/awards](http://www.epa.gov/aging/bhc/awards).

For more information, please visit...  
EPA Aging Initiative: [www.epa.gov/aging](http://www.epa.gov/aging)

Please submit questions by  
E-mail to: [aging.info@epa.gov](mailto:aging.info@epa.gov)

## Self Management Assessment And Resource Tool

The Self Management Assessment and Resource Tool includes 20 questions that can help a community assess its progress in integrating active aging concepts with smart growth principles. Each question focuses on a particular milestone, such as conducting a community assessment to determine the level of older adult participation in physical activity programs or formulating a plan to adopt smart growth planning. Communities are asked to select the category that best describes the progress of their active aging initiatives: not at all; partially completed; or fully completed. The tool also provides tips for getting started and links to potential resources for addressing each milestone. Communities can use the results from this self-test to identify opportunities to improve their active aging initiatives and smart growth planning efforts to promote a safe and healthy environment for older residents. For more information, please visit [www.epa.gov/aging/bhc/smart/index.htm](http://www.epa.gov/aging/bhc/smart/index.htm).

# Acknowledgements

## Thanks to the Steering Committee.

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**Nancy Whitelaw**, PhD, Director, Center for Healthy Aging and Senior Vice President, National Council on Aging

## Thanks to the BHCAA Awards Supporters.

AARP

Active for Life

America Walks

Administration on Aging

American Medical Association

American Public Health Association

Atlanta Regional Commission

American Society on Aging

Center for Civic Partnerships

Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists

Elder Care Advocacy of Florida

Generations United

Gerontological Society of America

Healthy Aging Research Network

International City/County Management Association

International Council on Active Aging

Local Government Commission

Milton H. Erickson Foundation, Inc.

National Association of Area Agencies on Aging

National Blueprint Initiative

National Council on Aging

National Indian Council on Aging

National Recreation and Park Association

Project for Public Spaces

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