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### Wenham Connects: An age and dementia friendly needs assessment

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# **Wenham Connects: An age and dementia friendly needs assessment**

**October 2018**

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Commissioned by the Town of Wenham Council On Aging

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Center for Social and Demographic Research on Aging  
Gerontology Institute  
John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy & Global Studies  
University of Massachusetts Boston

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# Town of Wenham

Town Hall  
138 Main Street  
Wenham, MA 01984

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Selectmen / Town Administrator  
Tel 978-468-5520 x2 Fax 978-468-8014

Dear Wenham Resident:

Over the past year, the Town of Wenham has committed time and resources to becoming an age and dementia friendly community. As the population of Wenham ages, we are taking a proactive, solutions-oriented approach to face the challenges of aging together. Creating a more supportive environment for older adults creates a more inclusive and compassionate community for all.

Our age friendly initiative is called Wenham Connects, *building a vibrant sense of community for older adults*. Some of you have heard about the initiative and many of you have received a postcard to your home, inviting you to participate in the age friendly survey and upcoming age friendly events at the Wenham Museum.

Two well attended Listening Sessions for older adults were held at Town Hall in early 2018. Through these forums, residents shared their reflections about strengths of the town, challenges people are facing, and recommendations for making the town a more livable place for healthy aging. Also, Wenham has recently been accepted into the Association for Retired Persons (AARP) Network of Age Friendly Communities. This designation acknowledges our steadfast commitment to be a part of this growing movement and provides a framework for our age friendly action planning efforts.

To help identify short- and long-term issues related to aging in Wenham, we secured grant funding from the state last spring to engage the services of University of Massachusetts Boston Gerontology Institute Center for Social and Demographic Research to conduct a needs assessment. This summer, UMass conducted focus groups and key informant interviews in Wenham. Considerable time was spent interviewing community stakeholders (Police, Fire, Council on Aging, Town Administration leaders) and focus groups that included a broad cross-section of residents and community organizations.

The resulting report *Planning for an Age-Friendly Wenham* blends key demographic information with what residents see as essential for aging well in Wenham. We are very pleased with the results of this effort and are grateful to all of the participants for their thoughtful contributions.

We look forward to integrating the findings from this needs assessment into a Five-Year Action Plan in the coming months. The results of the study will serve as a guide to Town Administration, Council on Aging and Board of Selectman in their planning efforts going forward to strategically advance relevant policies, programs, and projects that will have demonstrable impacts on improving the lives of our seniors.

Thank you for taking the time and interest to review this report.

Sincerely,

Peter Lombardi  
Town Administrator

## About the Authors

This report was produced by the Center for Social and Demographic Research on Aging (CSDRA), a research unit within the Gerontology Institute at UMass Boston. The CSDRA provides resources and research expertise to communities, non-governmental organizations, and other agencies that offer services to older adults in Massachusetts. The Center's mission is to inform communities as their populations become older demographically, and conduct research on topics that impact older adults seeking to age in their communities. Established in 2012, the Center has worked with over 30 communities across the Commonwealth.

Caitlin E. Coyle, PhD, is primarily responsible for the contents of this report. Others contributing to the project include Rebecca Mailman, Jan E. Mutchler, PhD, and Nidya Velasco.

## Acknowledgements

We offer our appreciation to Jim Reynolds, Director of the Wenham Council on Aging, and Peggy Cahill, Age-Friendly Consultant, for their leadership and guidance. As well, we are grateful to the Wenham residents and representatives who shared their thoughts as part of the data collection.

### **For more information, contact:**

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## Introduction

Wenham is a small residential community of approximately 5,000 residents located about 22 miles north of Boston. Public transit access to downtown Boston located in the neighboring town of Hamilton provides access to employment and recreational activities outside of the town's boundaries. In addition, Wenham is home to abundant green space (e.g., wetland systems and Wenham Lake) that provide residents with opportunities to enjoy the natural beauty of the area. The Wenham Council on Aging (COA) is a municipal department designed to serve the needs of Wenham's residents age 60 and older. It is responsible for advocating on behalf of Wenham's older adults and with enriching their lives by providing social, financial and health programs and services. The COA relies on a combination of Town funds, grants, user fees, donations, and volunteer services. The Wenham Senior Center serves as the hub through which COA programs and services are delivered, some of which are available to residents of all ages, including selected transportation services, access to information and referral services, and volunteer opportunities. Currently, 20% of Wenham's population is age 60 and older. It is expected that older adults will continue to make up a significant portion of the community in the coming years. Commissioned by the Wenham COA, this report will serve to help the COA and Town to better understand Wenham's current assets, potentials, and challenges, and to plan for changing town and community needs.

In June of 2018, Wenham was accepted into AARP's network of Age-Friendly Communities. The Wenham COA has taken the lead in planning for Age-friendly designation and will use the contents of this report to guide the development of an Age-Friendly Action Plan. Further, the COA and the Town have recognized the importance of discerning the specific needs of residents living with dementia and their families in this work. As a result, they have been intentional about the inclusion of residents living with dementia and their families in the initiative. This initiative is referred to as *Wenham Connects*.

At the request of Jim Reynolds, Director of the Wenham COA, and with the financial support of the Town of Wenham (via reallocation of Community Compact funds), CSDRA was contracted to conduct a demographic profile of the community, key informant interviews, and focus groups to draw upon insights from the community about current ways in which Wenham is already an age-friendly community, and suggest areas in which it could improve. This report is the result of that process.

### The Age-friendly Community Framework

Communities throughout the nation are pursuing new strategies to promote health and quality of life among their residents. Towns and cities are embarking on community-engaged initiatives meant to identify and improve local amenities and services that have a meaningful impact on resident well-being, based on WHO's "age-friendly communities" framework, as well as related models such as "livable communities" or "lifelong communities."

An “age-friendly” Community, as described by WHO, is one in which people participate in activities, are connected to their neighbors, remain healthy and active, and feel they belong—no matter their age. Through planning, taking action, and evaluating progress, communities all over the world are taking steps to improve their social and physical environments as a strategy for promoting health and well-being throughout the life course. The Age-friendly framework describes focus areas for communities and lays out a process intended to ensure repeated consultation with the community, collective reflection, action and evaluation. WHO also hosts the WHO Global Network for Age-friendly Communities (the Network), established in 2010 as a means of facilitating the exchange of information among communities. The Network currently includes 705 cities and communities in 39 countries (<https://extranet.who.int/agefriendlyworld/who-network/>). Many Massachusetts communities have already joined the Network and others are working towards that goal. In his January 2018 State of the State speech, Governor Baker announced that Massachusetts has joined the network of Age-Friendly States, signaling broader commitment to the principles that support aging in community.

**Domains.** The Age-friendly framework includes eight domains of community life that intersect with livability, accessibility, and the ability to thrive within the community (see **Figure 1**). Within each domain, elements are identified that are relevant to affordability, appropriateness, and accessibility.

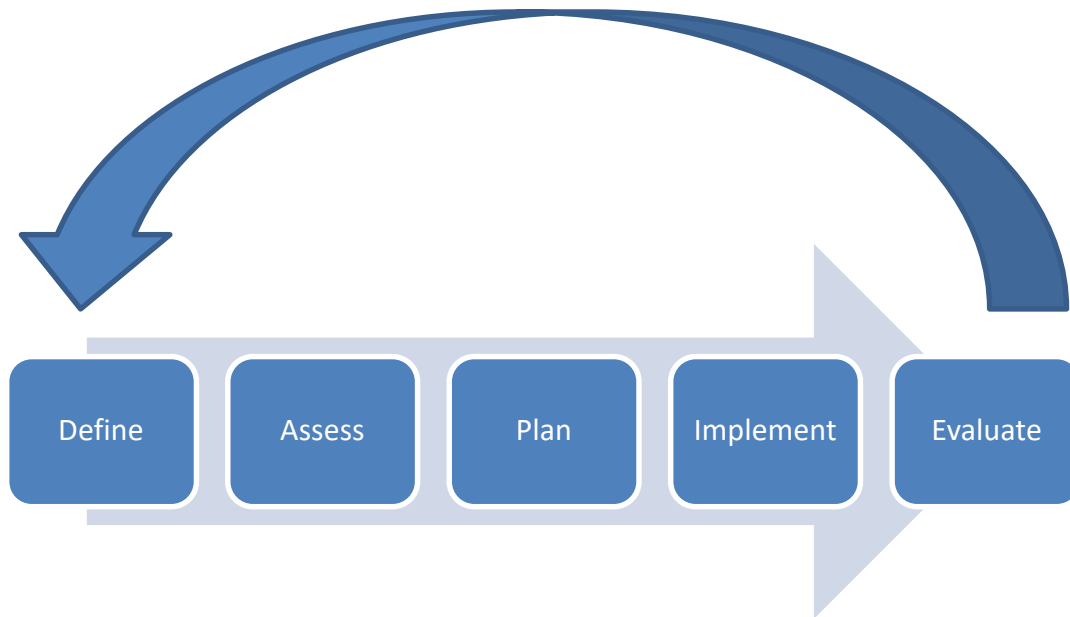
The description of age-friendly features, and the experiences of communities throughout the world that are using the framework, make clear that each community will conceptualize this effort in a somewhat unique way. Local conceptualizations will shape the initiatives, programs, and partnerships put in place; they will also shape the research and measurement used in support of the effort. Ultimately, the first step involved in pursuing an age-friendly agenda is to define and assess environmental features relative to the characteristics and resources of residents actually living in the community. Based on what is learned in that initial step, a community will develop an Action Plan designed to address the most pressing or most actionable issues identified through the needs assessment process. In subsequent years, as the Action Plan is

**Figure 1.**  
Eight Domains of an Age-friendly Community



implemented and evaluated, the broad goals of the Initiative may be modified in a continuous improvement cycle (see **Figure 2**). When working towards building an Age-friendly Community, it is helpful to keep in mind that not all domains must be addressed in a single cycle. The Town of Wenham may wish to select domains in which they are most prepared to make progress, or which are identified as priority areas by stakeholders.

**Figure 2.** Process for Developing an Age-friendly Community



### **The Dementia-friendly Community Framework**

The Alzheimer's Association estimates that in 2017, 5.5 million Americans, the large majority of whom are age 65 and older, had Alzheimer's dementia, representing ten percent of older adults in the U.S. Estimates suggest that when dementias other than Alzheimer's are accounted for, as many as 14% of people age 75 and older in the U.S. live with dementia ([https://www.alz.org/documents\\_custom/2017-facts-and-figures.pdf](https://www.alz.org/documents_custom/2017-facts-and-figures.pdf)). Because risk of dementia increases with age, the prevalence of dementia in the population will rise as the older population grows. The Massachusetts Healthy Aging report estimates that 13.9% of Wenham residents age 65 and older are living with Alzheimer's disease or dementia, similar to the state prevalence that is estimated to be 14.4%.

A Dementia Friendly community is based on efforts at all levels of the community. From individual residents to municipal and state government and private organizations, it takes a



collaboration of all involved in the community to foster a welcoming environment for those with Alzheimer's or related dementias in all of the domains as presented in **Figure 3**.

**Figure 3.** Facets of a Dementia Friendly Community



Reproduced from ACT on Alzheimer's® developed tools and resources.  
<http://www.actonalz.org/dementia-friendly-toolkit>

### The Wenham Connects Initiative

Some communities pursuing an age-friendly agenda are combining their “age-friendly” efforts with a “dementia-friendly” agenda, meant to simultaneously address features and practices that improve the ability of older adults with dementia to remain in the community. For example, making residents aware of services and supports that can help them stay in their homes if they experience a disabling chronic disease is a broad goal that may benefit a sizable share of older residents. Ensuring that the services and supports available extend to those with dementia makes this effort simultaneously age- and dementia-friendly.

*Wenham Connects* is one such age and dementia friendly initiative, aimed at building a more inclusive and supportive social environment in Wenham to improve the quality of life of residents across a wide spectrum of dimensions. The Town of Wenham has committed both time and resources to this initiative, which will use the results and recommendations presented in this report to help shape their action plan.

## Methods

The contents of this report are based on review of Wenham’s demographic features, five key informant interviews, and a series of four focus groups conducted by researchers at the Center for Social & Demographic Research on Aging (CSDRA) within the Gerontology Institute at the University of Massachusetts Boston (UMass Boston). Selected content is based on livability data pulled from AARP (<https://livabilityindex.aarp.org/>), the Massachusetts Healthy Aging Community Profile for Wenham (<https://mahealthyagingcollaborative.org/data-report/explore-the-profiles/community-profiles/>), and reports obtained from the Town of Wenham (see resource list). Among the reports obtained from the Town of Wenham were notes from two community forums that were facilitated by the Wenham COA in the winter of 2018. Approximately 35 residents attended one of these forums to share their perspective on the needs of Wenham residents as they anticipate growing older in Town.

Demographic information about Wenham was drawn from publicly available data sources, including the U.S. Census Bureau (decennial Census and the American Community Survey (ACS) and projections made available through the Donahue Institute at the University of Massachusetts (<http://pep.donahue-institute.org/>) and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC; <http://www.mapc.org/projections>). Data presented here describe recent and anticipated changes in the age distribution of the population of Wenham, along with selected characteristics of the current senior<sup>1</sup> population of the community.

The five key informant interviews were conducted to identify ways in which services are provided to older adults in Wenham and to gain perspective from these community leaders about the needs of Wenham residents. The four focus groups were conducted in an effort to hear from knowledgeable segments of the community, with participants recruited by the Director of the Wenham COA and the Age-Friendly Consultant. All of the focus groups were held at the Wenham Museum, and each lasted between one and one-and-a-half hours. Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The term “senior” is used to refer to anyone age 60 and older. This usage aligns with language included in the Older Americans Act. Where available, data are presented for the age 60 and over population; however, in some cases, existing data are only available for the population age 65 and over.

from the focus group discussion were drawn from a dedicated note-taker (a member of the CSDRA team) and from audiotapes of the focus group conversations. Each focus group started with introductions and an explanation of the Age-friendly framework presented by the discussion leader, followed by a group discussion. The discussion began with a focus on Wenham features considered to be positive assets for older residents and those seeking to age in place, followed by a discussion of features that could be improved. Suggestions offered by the focus group participants and relating to specific initiatives or potential action items were recorded and noted in the narrative below. A total of 32 individuals participated in the focus group discussions, including six representatives from Wenham town offices (one group), seven representatives from nonprofits and other key organizations in Wenham (one group), and 19 Wenham residents of all ages (two groups).

## Results

### Demographic Profile of Wenham

According to the American Community Survey (ACS), there were about 5,135 residents living in the Town of Wenham in 2016. About 33% of the population were age 50 and older (See **Table 1**). Residents who were age 50 to 59 made up 13% of the population; residents age 60 to 79 comprised around 13%, and an estimated 7% were age 80 and older.

**Table 1.** Number and percentage distribution of Wenham’s population by age category, 2016

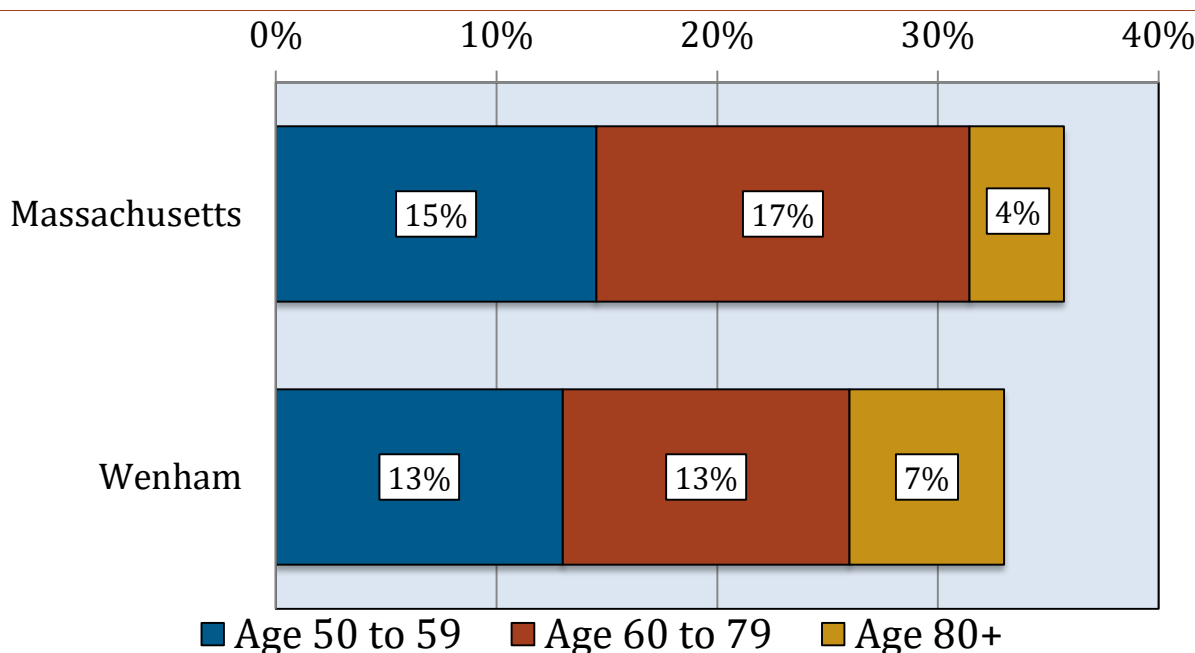
Age Category	Number	Percentage
Under age 18	957	18%
Age 18 to 49	2,503	49%
Age 50 to 59	666	13%
Age 60 to 79	664	13%
Age 80 and older	345	7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,135</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source: American Community Survey, 2012-2016, Table B01001. Numbers are calculated from 5-year survey estimates.*

The share of Wenham’s population age 50 and older is slightly lower than in Massachusetts as a whole (**Figure 4**). About 36% of the Massachusetts population was in the 50 and older age group in 2016, compared to 33% of the Wenham population. Compared to the Commonwealth, Wenham also had a slightly higher share of residents age 60 and older, and the share of Wenham residents age 80 and older is almost twice the share estimated for the state as a whole. In 2016, Massachusetts residents age 60 or older comprised about 21% of the population, including 4% age 80 and over. In Wenham, about 20% of the population was 60 or older, including 7% who were 80 years and older.

Population growth in both Massachusetts and the Wenham has been concentrated in older age groups. Between 2000 and 2010, Wenham’s total population increased by 10% while Massachusetts’ population grew by 3%. In both Wenham and Massachusetts, the absolute numbers of residents age 50 and over grew substantially during this same time period (*US Census, Table QT-P1*). The segment of Wenham’s population age 50 to 59 increased in size by 42%, and in Massachusetts overall by 29%. The population of residents who are age 60 and older increased by 14% in Wenham, compared to a 16% increase for the state.

**Figure 4.** Age distribution in Wenham and Massachusetts

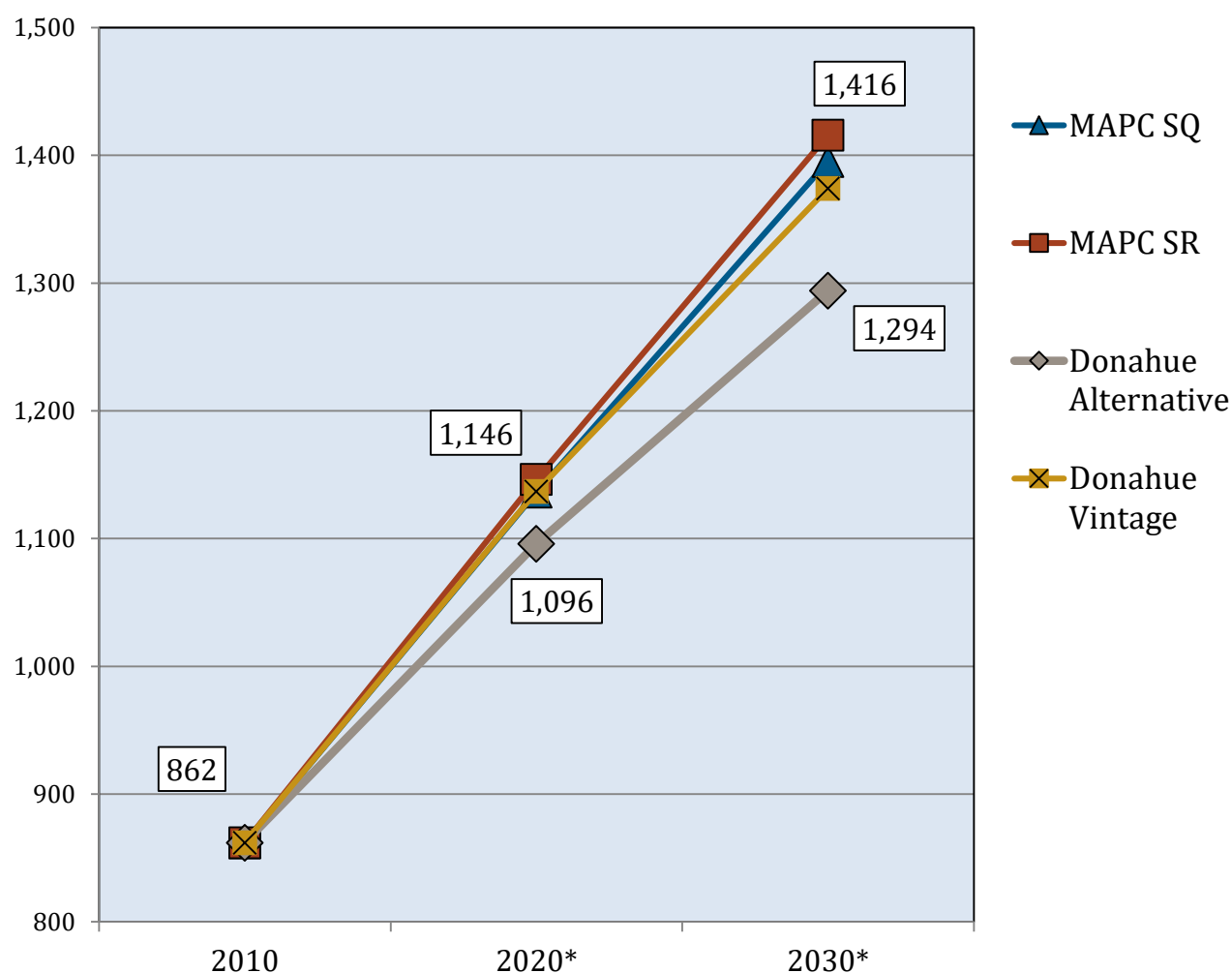


Source: American Community Survey, 2012-2016, Table B01001. Numbers are calculated from 5-year survey estimates

The number of older adults in Wenham is projected to continue to grow in the coming decades. **Figure 5** shows four sets of projections for the Wenham population age 60 and

over.<sup>2</sup> Two sets are generated by the Donahue Institute at the University of Massachusetts, and two by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC). All of them suggest increases in the number of older residents.

**Figure 5.** Alternative Wenham projections; number of residents age 60 and older 2010 with projections to 2020\* and 2030\*



Source: Population figures for 2010 are from the U.S. Census.

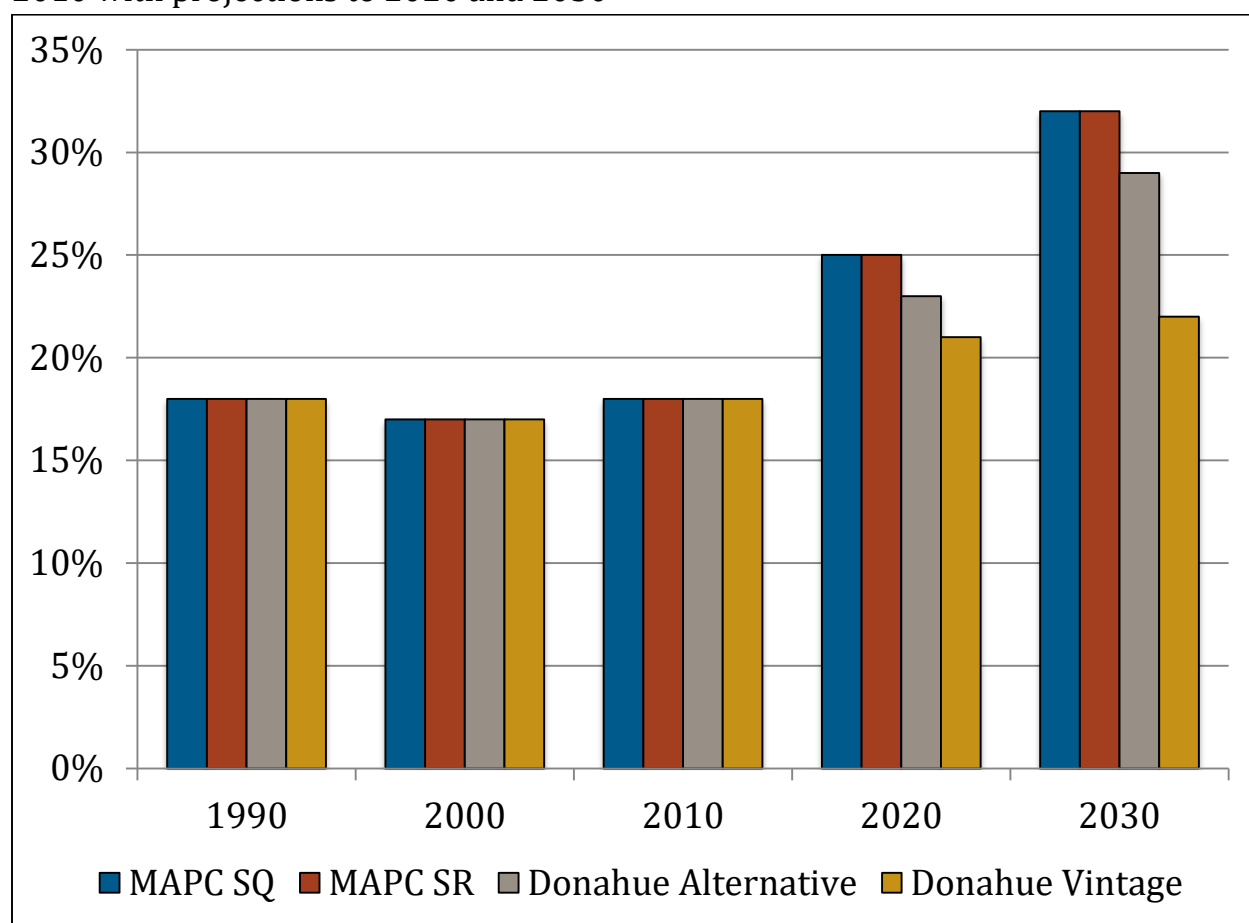
\* The four sets of projections for 2020 and 2030 are from two different sources:

1. Donahue Alternative and Vintage projections are estimated by the Donahue Institute, University of Massachusetts <http://pep.donahue-institute.org/>
2. MAPC Status Quo (SQ) and Stronger Region (SR) Scenarios projections are prepared by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council <https://www.mapc.org/learn/projections/>

<sup>2</sup> Population projections are shaped by assumptions about birth rates and death rates, as well as domestic and international in-migration and out-migration. For more information on the methods used to create Donahue Institute projections, see Renski, Koshgarian, & Strate (March 2015).

**Figure 6** shows the percentage of Wenham’s population from 1990 to 2000 that is age 60 or older, based on U.S. Census figures, and the expected share age 60 or older based on the four sets of population projections for 2020 and 2030. In 1990, about 18% of the Town’s population was age 60 and older; a percentage that remained at a stable level through 2000 and 2010. According to projections created by the MAPC, 25% of Wenham’s residents may be age 60 or older by 2020, rising to more than 30% by 2030. Projections generated by the Donahue Institute at the University of Massachusetts imply a lower level of increase, with one series (Donahue Alternative) suggesting that 29% of Wenham’s residents will be age 60 or older in 2030, and the other series (Donahue Vintage) suggesting 22%. Although it is impossible to know which projection series will more closely reflect the future population, we can be reasonably sure of two things: the number of residents age 60 or older will be larger in the coming decade, and the share of the population age 60 or older will likely increase at least modestly.

**Figure 6.** Population trends; share of Wenham residents age 60 and older, 1990 to 2010 with projections to 2020 and 2030

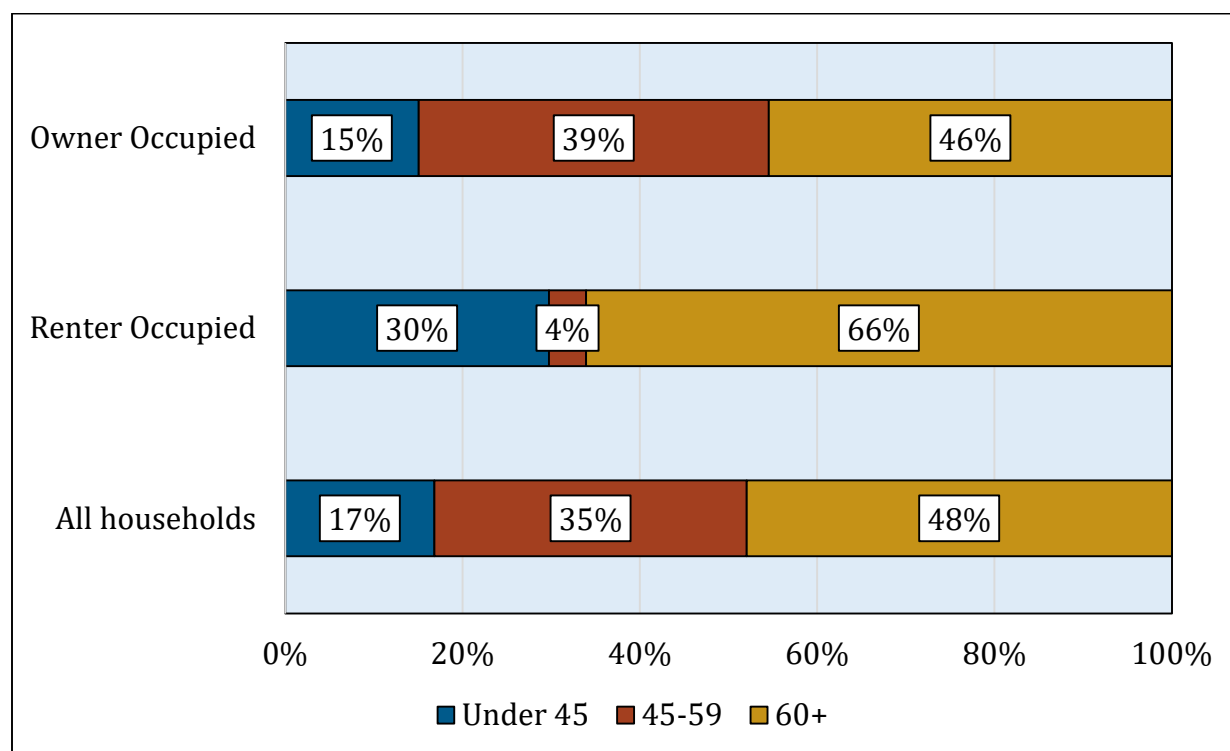


*Sources: Population figures for 1990 through 2010 are from the U.S. Census. Projection figures are from the Donahue Institute and MAPC. See source note in previous figure*

Wenham is less diverse than the Commonwealth with respect to race. For all ages combined, about 91% of Wenham residents report their race as White non-Hispanic, compared to 74% in Massachusetts (*ACS, 2012 – 2016, Table B01001*). Very few older adults in Wenham report nonwhite race or Hispanic ethnicity. The older population may become more diverse in coming years as the current population ages in place.

A majority of Wenham’s households have householders who are middle-aged or older. As used by the U.S. Census Bureau, a “householder” is the person reported as the head of household, typically the person in whose name the home is owned or rented. A large portion of householders in Wenham (83%) are age 45 and older<sup>3</sup> including 48% who are age 60 and older (**Figure 7**). Despite the relatively small number of residents who rent their homes in Wenham, it is interesting to note that 66% of them are age 60 and older.

**Figure 7.** Age structure of Wenham householders, by owner status



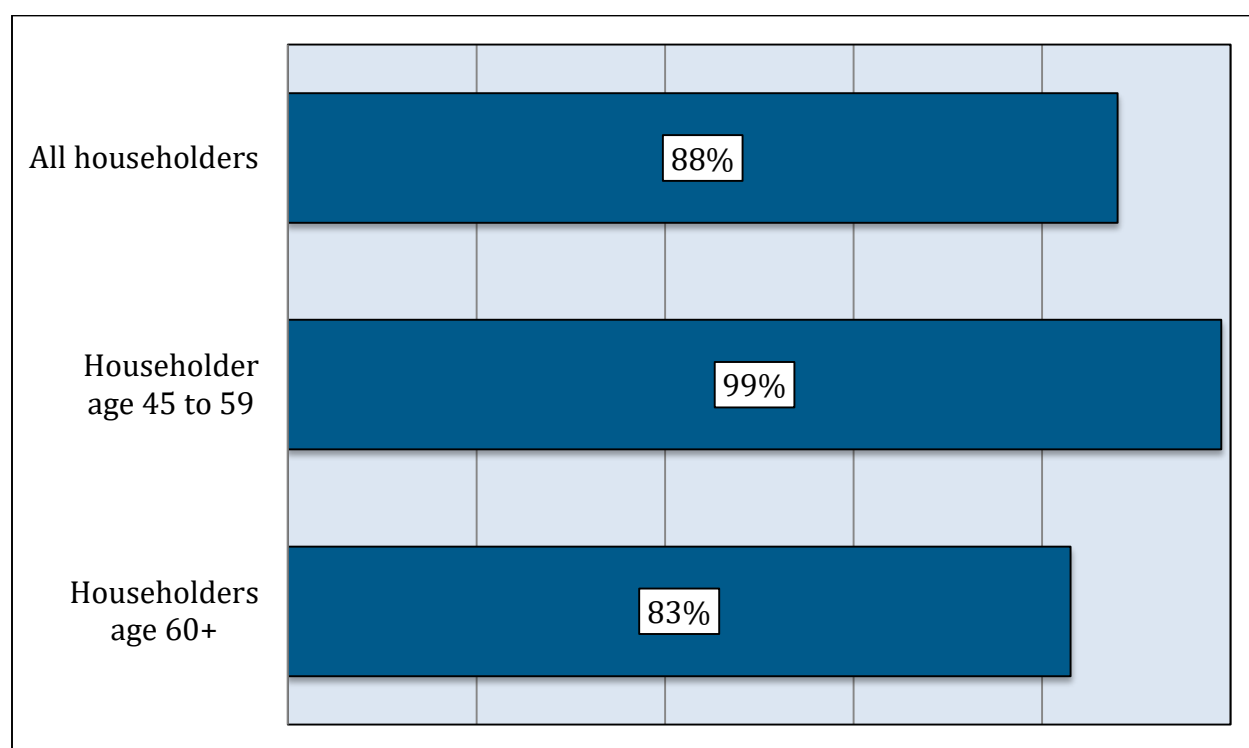
Source: American Community Survey, 2012-2016, Table B25007. Numbers are calculated from 5-year survey estimates.

<sup>3</sup> Many available Census data on the older population of Wenham are based on ages 45 and 65 as reference points rather than ages 50 and 60, as are used elsewhere in this report.

Most Wenham residents live in homes that they own or are purchasing (88%; **Figure 8**). Of those residents age 45 to 59 nearly all own their homes, along with 83% of householders age 60 and older. The prevalence of older homeowners has implications for what amenities and services are likely to be needed and valued by members of the community. Home maintenance and supports are often necessary for older homeowners—especially those who live alone—in order to remain comfortable and safe in their homes.

Additionally, according to data from the ACS, half of Wenham’s households have at least one individual who is age 60 or older (*ACS, 2012-2016, Table B11006*). This high proportion generally reflects the widespread demand for programs, services, and other considerations that address aging-related concerns, including health and caregiving needs, transportation options, and safe home environments.

**Figure 8.** Percentage of Wenham householders who own their home, by age category

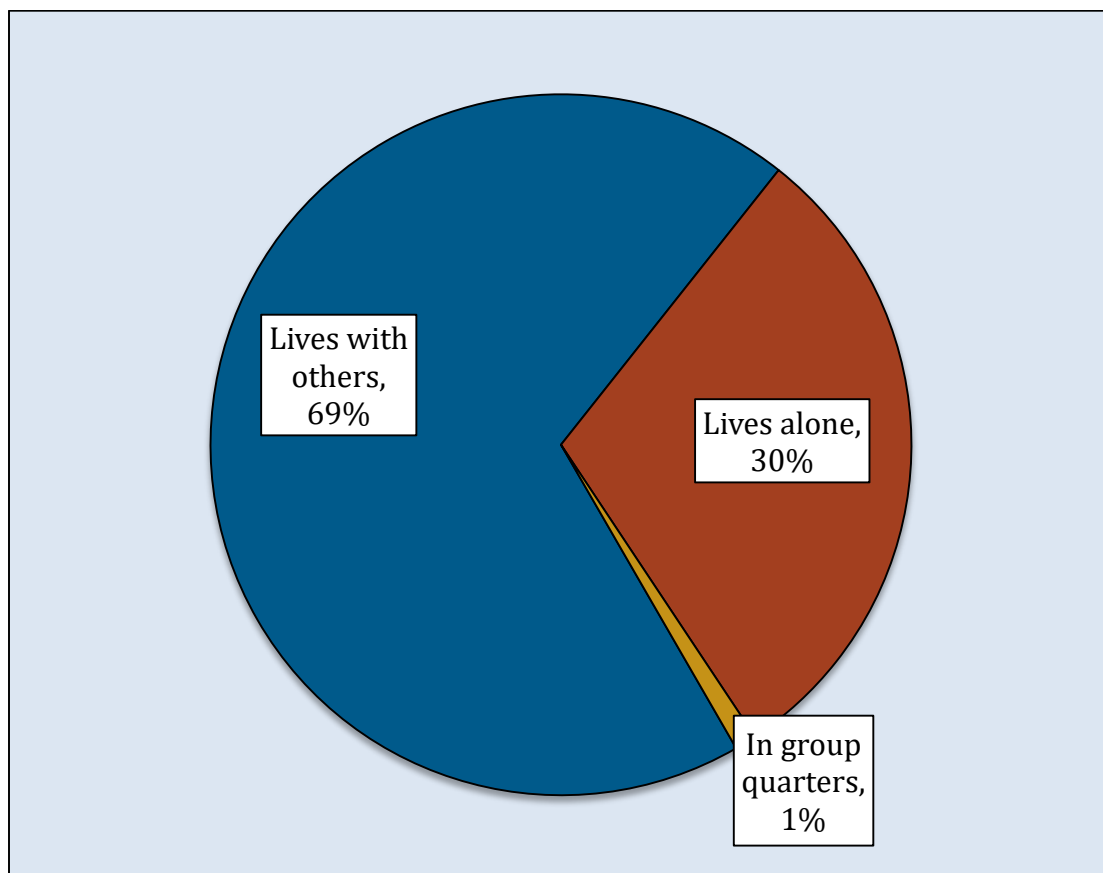


*Source: American Community Survey, 2012-2016, Tables B25007 and B25011. Numbers are calculated from 5-year survey estimates.*

A significant proportion of Wenham residents who are age 65 and older (30%) live alone, whereas 69% live in households that include other people, such as a spouse, parents, children, or grandchildren (**Figure 9**).



**Figure 9.** Living arrangements of Wenham residents, age 65 and older



*Source: American Community Survey, 2012-2016, Table B09020. Numbers are calculated from 5-year survey estimates.*

The ACS estimates on education suggest that Wenham residents are well educated on average, and about 44% of persons 65 and older have a bachelor's degree or more (ACS, 2012-2016, Table B15001). This educational profile contributes to the vitality and character of the community, which depends on older adults who value opportunities to be involved through volunteer and civic engagement activities, as well as late-life learning opportunities— activities that are often present in highly educated communities (Fitzgerald & Caro, 2014).

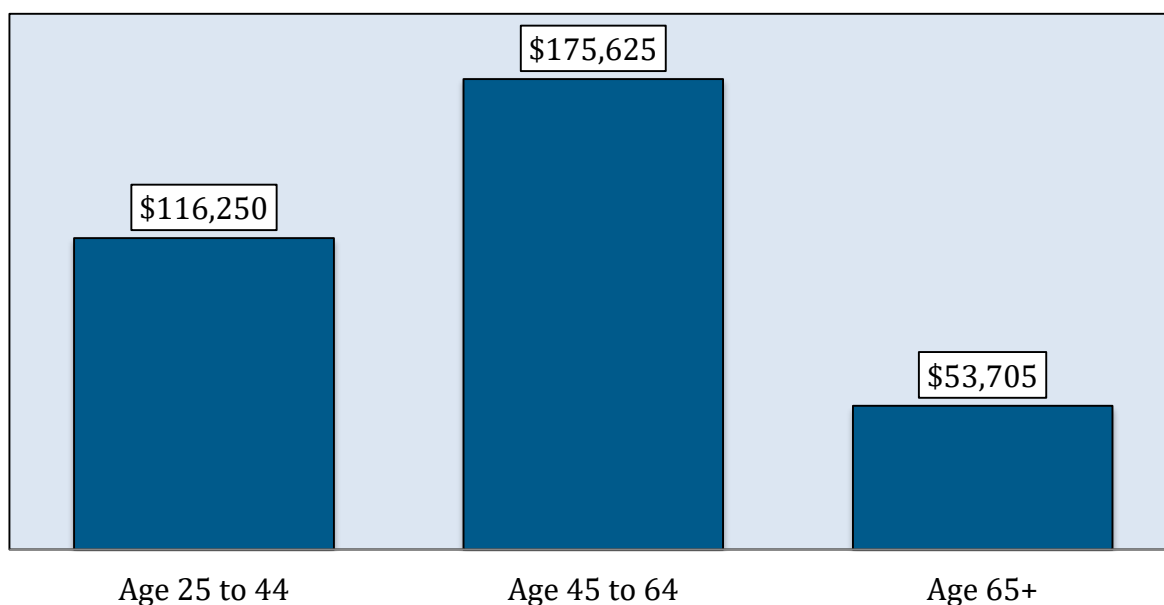
Similar to older adults living in communities throughout the U.S., a large proportion of Wenham residents aged 65 and over remain in the workforce. Over one-third of adults age 64 to 74 are participating in the labor force, along with 6% of those age 75 and older (ACS, 2012-2016, Table S2301).

Nearly 65% of men age 65 and older report veteran status (ACS, 2012-2016, Table B21001), a higher share than is observed for the Commonwealth as a whole. As a result, many of

Wenham's older residents may be eligible to receive some benefits and program services based on their military service or that of their spouses.

With respect to household income, there is some comparative disadvantage among older residents in Wenham (**Figure 10**). Wenham's median household income across all-age households (\$99,375) is considerably higher than the income estimated for Massachusetts as a whole (\$70,954). Among householders 65 and older, the median income is \$53,705 which, although higher than the statewide median for this age group (\$42,707), is much lower than the median income of Wenham householders under the age of 65. Among Wenham's householders, those aged 45 to 64 have the highest median income at \$175,625—which is greater than the statewide median for this age group (\$87,533).

**Figure 10.** Median household income in Wenham by age and living situation of householder (in 2016 inflation-adjusted dollars)



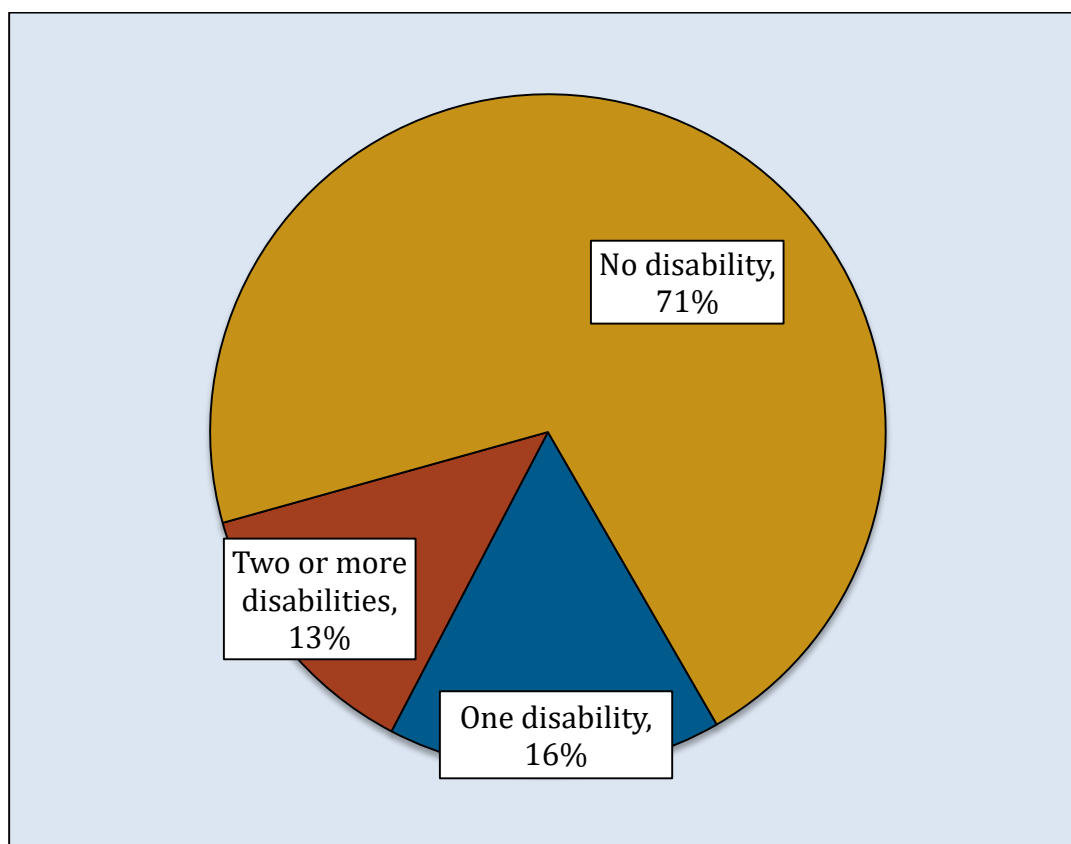
Source: American Community Survey, 2012-2016, Table B19049. Numbers are calculated from 5-year survey estimates.

Note: Includes only community households, not group quarters such as nursing homes.

The increased likelihood of acquiring disability with age is evident in data from the ACS. Many Wenham residents age 65 and older experience some level of disability that could impact their ability to function independently in the community. About 16% of Wenham's residents age 65 and older have one disability, and nearly 13% report two or more disabilities (**Figure 11**). Among the different types of disability that are assessed in the ACS, the most commonly cited by Wenham residents age 65 and older were ambulatory

difficulties —difficulty walking or climbing stairs—reported by 18% (*ACS 2012-2016, Table S1810*). Other disabilities experienced by older Wenham residents included hearing problems (14%), independent living limitations—difficulty doing errands alone, such as visiting a doctor’s office or shopping—reported by 11%. According to the Massachusetts Healthy Aging Profile for Wenham, 14% of the senior population lives with Alzheimer’s disease.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 11.** Percentage of Wenham residents age 65 and older reporting at least one disability



Source: U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2012-2016, Table C18108.

Percentages by age group do not sum to 100% because people may report multiple difficulties and do not include those with no difficulties assessed by the ACS.

<sup>4</sup> Massachusetts Healthy Aging Community Profile for Wenham (<https://mahealthyagingcollaborative.org/data-report/explore-the-profiles/community-profiles/>).

## Findings from Key Informants & Focus Groups

Findings in this report are organized by the eight domains of community life as laid out in the Age-friendly framework and **Figure 1** above. For each domain a brief description of information gleaned from existing data and resources relevant to the topic is offered, followed by a description of Wenham's positive features and concerns as expressed by residents and others consulted through the focus group and key informant processes. Each section includes a set of suggestions offered by community participants regarding how Wenham could improve its age-friendly features. Although each group was presented with information to foster awareness of the elements and features involved in the Age-friendly framework, the facilitator did not insist that every domain be discussed, and the priorities addressed were initiated by the group. As a result, information provided by the focus groups and interviews, outlined below, is more expansive for some domains than it is for others.

### Housing

Housing was a topic of extensive discussion in all four focus groups and was identified by every key informant as being a pressing issue facing the Town of Wenham as it grapples with planning for the changes to its population both now and in the future. In the coming decade, many middle-aged and older Wenham residents will encounter decision points regarding whether to remain in their existing homes, downsize to a smaller and perhaps more affordable residence in Wenham, or move to another community offering a better fit for their evolving circumstances. For the aging Wenham resident, factors likely to contribute to that decision include changing family and work commitments; shifting physical capacity to remain in one's current home; and the affordability of staying in a community where housing values, and the associated consumer costs, are high.

In addition to the housing concerns that arose, positive aspects of Wenham's housing landscape were noted. Enon Village, the Town's only affordable housing building, provides not only affordable living space but also social programming and is walkable to area amenities like CVS Pharmacy. In addition, there have been efforts taken by the Town in recent years to develop more housing options in Wenham. Two developments are underway: Wenham Pines, a 24-unit condo complex with 2 affordable units, and Maplewoods, a 60-unit affordable housing community for adults age 55 and older. Currently the development of Maplewoods has been stalled due to litigation, but if development proceeds it would advance Wenham past the 10% affordability requirement set by the state (Housing Needs Assessment, 2017).

Despite the recent efforts to develop more housing options in Wenham, there exists a lack of options for current older adults wanting to age in the Wenham community. Focus group participants and key informants noted that housing is a significant concern for residents of all ages, and is especially concerning for older adults on fixed or declining incomes. Even with the benefits resulting from high property values, housing costs were noted to be particularly problematic.

**Suggestions Drawn from Community Input:**

- Develop co-housing models in which older adult homeowners have a mechanism to rent rooms to both exchange social support but also earn some income.
- Create mechanisms for older residents to access trusted handyman services and other property maintenance resources.
- Develop housing closer to the “center” of Town
- Consider changes to zoning laws to accommodate “multi-senior” households—wherein multiple seniors can share a single-family home.
- Develop more affordable downsizing options, preferably in walking distance to breakfast options, stores etc.
- Better educate the community on current zoning laws (for example, relating to accessory dwelling unit regulations).

According to focus group participants, lack of options causes older adults to leave Wenham, shrinking the social networks of those left behind. Participants identified the lack of any type of supportive housing (e.g., assisted living, nursing home, or continuing care retirement community) as another reason that older adults leave Wenham. It was also noted that those needing these levels of support must pay privately for assistance in their homes or rely on family care providers to age safely in the community. Physical maintenance of homes and property in Wenham was also identified by community participants as a reason for needing or

wanting to downsize. For those who remain living in Wenham as they age, a need for access to affordable and trustworthy home maintenance resources (e.g., lawn care, home repair or handyman services) was identified.

Virtually every group mentioned high property taxes as a factor compromising economic security. Participants described a spiraling “cycle” through which young families were drawn to Wenham because of its excellent school system, driving up the cost of housing and, in turn, the property tax levies. Participants recognized the difficulty placed on the Town budget in Wenham, in that the lack of commercial tax revenue due to the limited commercial base places heavy reliance on property taxes to fund municipal services. However, a pressing need for solutions to this problem was voiced.

## **Cross-Cutting Theme: Affordability and Economic Security**

### **Community Input:**

- Participants perceive that there is a segment of the senior resident population that “can’t afford to live here” and yet they remain living in a vulnerable economic state. It is an “invisible” need.
- Some participants observe a division between high- and low-income residents.
- Because Wenham lacks a commercial base, town finances rely on private homeowners.

### **Suggestions Drawn from Community Input:**

- Improve communication and publicity about the Senior Tax Work Off Program and the Senior Circuit Breaker Tax Credit available to seniors in Wenham.
- Consider creating part-time flexible employment opportunities for seniors in Wenham (e.g., at Town Offices, at schools, or with childcare)

There was discussion among focus group participants about the possibilities of utilizing the current housing stock in Wenham (primarily single-family homes) to generate new models of housing for seniors. For example, changes to zoning laws could allow multiple unrelated seniors to share living space or for seniors to rent rooms to adults as a way of both exchanging social support; as well as generating some supplemental income to offset the rising costs of living in Wenham.

### **Transportation**

In many respects, transportation options in Wenham already include many age-friendly features. The Massachusetts Healthy Aging report lists Wenham as “somewhat walkable,” and the AARP livability index ranks Wenham’s transportation system highly, specifically citing availability of convenient transportation options. Wenham also offers public transportation options through the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), which serves Wenham via commuter rail (located in neighboring Hamilton), and the RIDE, a door-to-door paratransit service. In addition, the Wenham COA offers transportation services, including van service for grocery shopping or to visit the COA. All together, these features suggest that older adults in Wenham have some options for getting where they need to go.

Community participants acknowledged that Wenham has some positive transportation features. Participants value the proximity to public transportation options to Boston, and several positively evaluated a COA program that assists older adults with short errands.

#### **Suggestions Drawn from Community Input:**

- Recruit local residents to drive for Uber or Lyft and service Wenham residents.
- Pilot-test the use of the COA van for evening events or weekend programming.
- Learn more about how Hamilton’s medical transportation system operates.
- Encourage the use of volunteer drivers, including for special events/outings.
- Generate a more creative slogan or name for the side of the COA van. For example, “Take a ride. You have earned it!”

Despite these transportation options, it was noted by focus group participants that to access public transportation, a person must be physically and cognitively capable of getting themselves to a station or stop. Further, the amount of time it takes to access public transportation in Wenham could easily amount to an entire day. Some community participants describe “stigma” associated with using the COA van—as though taking the van indicates a “loss of independence” rather than use of a

convenient and affordable transportation option.

Wenham does not have a clearly defined “town center” and walkability of the community was identified as one area of transportation needing improvement. Some neighborhoods within Wenham are more walkable than others, but the “lack of connectivity” has implications for health, social interaction, and older adults’ ability to get around the community safely. Other concerns and areas for improvement regarding transportation include the limited operational hours of the COA van (no evenings or weekends) and limited access to medical transportation.

#### **Outdoor Spaces & Buildings**

Wenham offers residents good proximity to beautiful trails and parks---positive features that promote quality of life. Only two municipal buildings in town are noncompliant with ADA requirements (the Fire Station and the Iron Rail rental building). Further, a recent (2017) Outdoor Spaces & Recreation plan identifies several “age-friendly” actions that will be undertaken over the next seven years. For example, the Town of Wenham plans to review the accessibility of local parks and outdoor facilities for children and adults with disabilities, identify walking facilities for seniors, install benches along local trails and improve signage and communication about local trails and parks.

Participants talked at length about the value of having a rural or “country” feel in the Town and yet still being close to cities like Beverly, Salem, and Boston. Despite the aforementioned greenspace (e.g., trails and parks), participants made clear that there is very limited “walkability” in Town—few sidewalks in the downtown area and few destinations or amenities to walk to exist. It was concluded that this lack of walkability not only presents a challenge to older adults who no longer drive or no longer wish to drive; it also has implications for the attractiveness of Wenham to younger residents who

#### **Suggestions Drawn from Community Input:**

- Ensure that all parks and trails in Wenham are accessible to people with disabilities, including parking, benches and signage.
- Better promote the availability of local greenspace in Wenham.
- Create increased “connectivity” in Wenham via sidewalks, paths or bike routes.
- Develop more destinations to walk to.

are seeking communities that have local amenities within a “town center”. There are parts of Wenham in which this limited connectivity also means that residents may be less likely to interact with their neighbors—an activity identified as an important feature of “age-friendliness” by participants. In addition, participants identified some areas of Wenham, parks in particular, that were relatively unused and unknown to them. This prompted discussion of a need for communication about greenspaces (e.g., maps, descriptions, signage and local promotional events), and also accessibility in terms of parking, benches, and access by those residents with disabilities (e.g., ramps, paved trails, and trail widths that could accommodate wheelchairs or other assistive devices).

#### **Communication & Information**

Wenham residents can access many sources of Town information. Websites for the Town as well as for the COA provide a wide range of information useful to residents. The COA also distributes a monthly newsletter, *The Wenhamite*, which is posted online as well as distributed in print form. *The Wenhamite* largely includes information about activities and services available through the COA and is mailed monthly to 735 households with at least one member age 60 and older. The primary local weekly newspaper is the Hamilton-Wenham Chronicle. Several social media pages exist for Wenham residents to communicate among themselves.



Several participants noted areas needing improvement relating to information distribution and communication. A general lack of awareness about COA programs was observed, and participants in most of the focus

groups suggested that residents need more information on aging-related issues. Several participants remarked that residents who don't use social media, including many older residents, are excluded from getting Town information when electronic media is prioritized. Participants discussed the importance of making information available to residents through multiple types of media, including both print and digital sources.

**Suggestions Drawn from Community Input:**

- Make *The Wenhamite* available as an e-news listserve to which residents may subscribe to receive information via weekly email.
- Expand the content of *The Wenhamite* to include services and other community resources.
- Create an online senior services directory including comprehensive information about services in the area.
- Use the Town Meeting Warrant Articles mailing as a way of distributing information about resources available in Wenham.
- Create a "Welcome Packet" for the COA to mail to residents when they turn 60 as well as new residents.
- Publicize a "senior information hotline" at the COA where knowledgeable staff/volunteers can answer questions from residents and family members about available resources in the area.
- Place suggestion boxes in high-traffic areas like the library or post-office to gather programming ideas for the COA.

A few communication gaps across departments and organizations within Wenham were noted. Some participants highlighted barriers to communication among first-responders and the COA, which can result in gaps in

communication about particularly vulnerable community residents.

There was consensus among focus group participants that there are not adequate information resources for Wenham residents. The need to access a variety of mechanisms to find information about what is available in the Town as well as regionally was noted, and finding information is particularly challenging for newcomers to Wenham. One resident points out that addresses are not always included on materials about events or programs. The perception is that residents "just know" where to go, which participants noted is not always the case. This idea that older residents of Wenham who are aging in their homes are not aware of the breadth of services available to them, coupled with an overall consensus that Wenham older adults are hesitant to "ask for help", results in a segment of Wenham residents unnecessarily living in vulnerable conditions.

## Social Participation

Wenham residents have access to the Hamilton-Wenham Public Library, the COA, the

### Suggestions Drawn from Community Input:

- Consider ways to expand the capacity of the COA to offer more programming, including increased collaboration with the Hamilton COA.
- Engage Gordon College to partner on programs that will foster intergenerational experiences in social, service or educational settings.
- Expand the “Senior to Senior” day program to exist longer than current one day, and develop relationships between various departments in Wenham.
- Develop a technology “help desk” at local schools where residents can get help over the phone or in person.
- Start a breakfast club at the Wenham Tea House for residents to gather and engage in conversation.
- Encourage neighborhoods to host block parties or organize neighbor meetings to discuss local issues and build stronger bonds.
- Leverage the library and Wenham Museum as partners in facilitating multigenerational-oriented programs.

Wenham Tea Room, and the Wenham Museum as social gathering spaces in Town. The COA and the library are specifically noted as assets in the community, both offering programming and space for residents to engage and enjoy. The COA is very limited in its physical space for programming and activities. Additionally, the library does offer space for meetings but is limited in terms of spaces for social interaction and participants noted the library does not provide regular opportunities for older adults or intergenerational programming. Participating residents observed that there is currently no community space in Wenham for residents of all ages to gather socially and engage in programming or service across generations.

Overall, there was an acknowledgement among all community participants that there are not adequate opportunities for residents to engage socially. There are very few physical spaces for residents to gather, in part attributed to the lack

of a town center in Wenham. Further, it was noted that space at both the library and the COA is very limited in capacity. Participants suggested that lack of communal intergenerational gathering spaces perpetuates a perceived gap and lack of cohesion among parents, youth, and older adults in the community. There was agreement among community participants of all ages represented that intergenerational and multigenerational experiences are desired. Two specific opportunities for building these experiences were identified: partnerships with Gordon College, and expanding the existing “Senior to Senior Day” program that the public schools facilitate.

## Community Supports & Health Services

Data from the Massachusetts Healthy Aging report suggests that Wenham has access to a number of health services in surrounding communities. In addition, the Town's most recent annual report makes recommendations for the Board of Health to collaborate with the COA

### Suggestions Drawn from Community Input:

- Expand the social work capacity of the Town and/or the COA.
- Explore opportunities to develop a "Village" program or "Neighbors Brigade" program in Wenham.
- Target outreach and resource development for local and distant caregivers, include opportunities for respite.
- Continue to encourage residents to "check on their neighbors" during storms or extreme temperatures.

on programming.

Perhaps the most compelling challenge facing Wenham with respect to community supports and health services is that of garnering participation from residents. Nearly all key informants identified this challenge, which makes it difficult to identify the needs of the community and thus be in a position to respond to those needs. It is clear that in order to address this pervasive challenge to serving the community, organizations

and municipal departments must work together, and in fact the most recent Town annual report recommended that the Public Health Nurse, the COA, the Buker Elementary School and Gordon College work together to boost health education and outreach to the community.

The second most pervasive need related to community supports as identified by participating residents and stakeholders was related to "aging-in-place" and the need for resources, information and support for older residents who are aging in Wenham. This need was noted as being particularly salient given the lack of housing with supports available in Wenham and the fact that many residents do not meet eligibility requirements for subsidized services like home care. Among participants, there was brainstorming about how to leverage neighbors as a resources for increasing support for older residents living in the community. Relatedly, participants recalled that during recent storms reminders were posted for residents to "check on their neighbors" and that this type of community messaging should be continued and expanded beyond storms.

Participants also discussed the barriers that young people face living in Wenham (e.g., high cost of housing, limited economic opportunities) and the overall trend towards families being more geographically dispersed which means that many in the older adult population do not have family nearby. Particularly among stakeholders and key informants, the scenario of "long-distance caregiving" was described as a common reality for older adults in Wenham. A few participants had direct experience dealing with these caregivers, and the needs they identified were largely related to difficulty in remotely obtaining information about local resources for their loved one, and difficulty in obtaining trustworthy sources for providing a realistic view of what is going on with their family member.

## Civic Engagement & Employment

It is necessary for an age-friendly community to have opportunities for citizens to engage in volunteer and civic activities. The Town of Wenham is home to multiple opportunities for residents of all ages to be engaged in the municipal government. The Wenham Citizen's Leadership Academy was started as a way to recruit volunteers to boards and committees. The Academy is a 12-week evening program that educates residents about each of the Town Departments, boards and committees, and local policymaking and budgetary processes.

Additionally, Wenham has a fully-subscribed Senior tax work-off program with 10 residents enrolled. This program gives residents age 60 and older an opportunity to earn an abatement on their real estate property tax bill. The hourly wage is \$11.00 and the maximum annual abatement cannot exceed \$1,500. The positions available through this program are in various departments throughout the Town. Job placements are commonly made with the Town Clerk's Office, Town Finance Office, Town Permitting Office, COA, and the Hamilton-Wenham Public Library. The program is beneficial to residents both as a mechanism for obtaining some financial relief, but also an opportunity to be civically engaged in the community. Simultaneously, these tax work-off positions provide real value to Wenham by expanding staff capacity. One town department employer noted "I think those are really well spent dollars when we think about the value that you're getting here in Town Hall. For me, it's how I keep my department going. My office would not be in the shape it's in today without that program."

Participants observed that Wenham includes a large number of older adults who are well

### Suggestions Drawn from Community Input:

- Host the Citizen's Leadership Academy during the day to make it more accessible to seniors.
- Continue to ensure that older residents or a representative from the COA are involved in discussions about community planning.
- Limit the terms of boards and committees to ensure that healthy turnover occurs.
- Engage in a systematic review of boards, committees and commissions to ensure that mission statements are being adhered to and that duplication or gaps in services are not occurring.

educated, experienced, and able to contribute to the community. Several participants observed that as a community, Wenham effectively includes some of these older adults as active volunteers and civic participants. For example, many board and committee members are older adults. It was also mentioned that the COA Director is actively involved in planning groups around Town that have proven to be highly valuable.

There was a feeling among participating residents that existing boards and committees could benefit from some realignment with respect to their goals and missions. There was a perception among participating residents that, over

time, some of these governing boards have veered from their original missions and caused some dysfunction and duplication of efforts. This type of realignment could also be an

opportunity to educate the community about the role and function of each entity. Finally, access to information about civic engagement opportunities was noted as a gap in Wenham. Although the Citizen's Academy is intended to help with that gap, it is currently only offered in the evenings and is not conducive to residents who do not drive at night. In addition, a discussion among focus group participants indicates some confusion about the eligibility requirements of the tax work-off program as well as a general lack of awareness of this benefit to Wenham residents.

### **Respect & Social Inclusion**

The social isolation of older adults has become a public health crisis facing communities all over the world. It is associated with negative physical and mental health outcomes and creates challenges for communities as they seek to be supportive of residents aging in place. It is therefore a key goal of age-friendly communities to create environments where older adults of all backgrounds and abilities, including persons living with dementia, have the opportunity to engage with others. As outlined in the Social Participation section of this report, Wenham has few places for residents to gather socially and for older adults with limited mobility (both physical and in terms of transportation) and dwindling social networks, some features of the Wenham community increase the risk of social isolation among older adults.

Participants referenced the importance of the school system in Wenham as not only a strength of the community but a scaffolding of a social network in the Town. It was observed by participants that if you are not connected to the schools in some way, there are limited social networks to join in Wenham. Participants also observed that families do not stay in Wenham after their children have graduated from the school system and that parents are so busy with children's activities that there is not an opportunity to engage with older residents—both of these characteristics may contribute to the decay of sense of community. One participant noted “they move in, the kids go through the school districts, they graduate, and then people go elsewhere. That's really an issue in terms of the identity of the community...you would like to think there was a greater sense of community for them to want to stay.”

One participating resident explained that if a resident is not connected to the school system or participating at the COA, there is “nowhere to fit in” in Wenham. That is, for “empty nesters” or residents without children, Wenham can be a difficult community in which to feel welcome.

#### **Suggestions Drawn from Community Input:**

- Continue to develop mechanisms for outreach, education, and support to families dealing with dementia.
- Consider re-messaging efforts at the COA to avoid inferences of ageism.
- Target engagement efforts at persons without children, including empty-nesters and seniors. For example, send a birthday greeting to residents when they turn 60, inviting them to the COA.

Participants explained that many people originally moved here for the privacy offered, contributing further to a lack of belonging sensed by some residents. Older residents in particular may have concerns about privacy (e.g., vulnerable to scams or identity theft) as well as a fear of losing their independence. For example, key informants from the emergency response departments in

Wenham illustrate the difficulty they face in having older residents open their doors when they are responding to a call or offering non-emergent services (e.g., changing smoke detector batteries or making a wellness visit). It was evident that if residents are so hesitant to engage with trusted officials in the Town, they must also be wary of others, which was also voiced by participants.

A final theme that emerged relative to this domain is the perception in Town that being associated with the COA means you’re “old” or “dependent”, and participants were keenly aware that this issue requires some attention in order to engage more residents. There was discussion about how to redefine what it means to “age in Wenham.” The COA is certainly a vibrant corner of the community; and participants were eager to build on that infrastructure to create more opportunities for the social inclusion of older residents.

## **Conclusion & Recommended Priorities**

As Wenham moves towards becoming an increasingly age and dementia friendly community, the Town has an opportunity to utilize and build on the many assets already in place, including the COA and the human resource of its older residents. To aid in planning for the projected increase in the older population, this report provides Wenham and the COA with a tool that is informed by resident and stakeholder input. The contents of this report can be used to improve services and programs for older adults and to overall improve Wenham’s standing as an age and dementia friendly community.

Based on the detailed findings reported here, we make recommendations to the team leading the *Wenham Connects* initiative as to the age and dementia friendly domains that should be prioritized. Given the weight of each topic in discussion with participants in this project, we recognize that Housing, Communication & Information, Community Supports & Health Services, and Social Participation domains be prioritized when developing an action plan.



While it is not feasible for *Wenham Connects* to address all of the facets and needs of these domains, it is recommended that *Wenham Connects* considers what role their initiative can play in coalescing partners and leading advocacy efforts. Based on the needs identified in this report, we offer the following details about how *Wenham Connects* may begin to address each of the recommended priority areas:

Housing. Given that the high costs associated with housing in Wenham were identified by community participants as a crucial need of the senior community, we suggest that the *Wenham Connects* initiative consider ways to make tax relief programs available to the widest range of residents and advocate for other ways to bring economic support to seniors in Town via discounts on fees associated with housing or property maintenance. In addition, through exploration of alternative housing models, *Wenham Connects* can work as a liaison between the Town and senior residents to review existing zoning laws and pilot test these options as a way of addressing the serious need in Wenham for affordable housing options for seniors wishing to downsize.

Communication & Information. As evidenced through conversations from this project, awareness of resources and programs for seniors in Wenham and surrounding areas is inconsistent. We recommend that *Wenham Connects* prioritizes this domain as a way of centralizing communication to the senior population in Town and their caregivers. For example, communicating that one key function of the COA is a hub of information and referral to programs and services in the area could provide residents with a familiar point of contact. Further, the *Wenham Connects* initiative could function as a liaison between the senior community and the various news sources in Town to address gaps in communication and awareness about programs and services among residents.

Community Supports and Health Services. For families in Wenham who are providing care to an aging family member as well as those residents in Wenham who are receiving significant support from caregivers who does not live in Town, the need for additional support and information was identified. We suggest that the *Wenham Connects* initiative address ways of continuing community education about dementia and caregiving resources. To the extent possible, we also recommend that opportunities for dementia-friendly support or respite for caregivers, even for small increments of time, be explored. Through programs that bring together care providers in the community, *Wenham Connects* can provide opportunities for residents to share experiences and reduce feelings of isolation that can accompany care work. Identifying socially isolated seniors in Wenham was described as a difficult but important task for the *Wenham Connects* initiative. Drawing on the strong cohesion of neighbors, *Wenham Connects* could foster ways for residents to work together on strategies for addressing social isolation among seniors in Wenham. One example is to create ways for homebound residents and those living with dementia to participate in programming at the COA.

Social Participation. Results outlined in this report make it clear that physical space for residents of all ages to gather socially is limited in Wenham. Further, there was a strong

sentiment among participants for the need for more opportunities for social interaction across generations in Wenham. We suggest that the *Wenham Connects* initiative encourage utilization of existing spaces such as the Wenham Museum, the Tea Room, and the library to hold space for regular intergenerational programming. In addition, *Wenham Connects* could work on building participation from local entities and build on existing intergenerational programming such as through engaging Gordon College and expanding the “Senior to Senior” program with the school. Encouraging informal groups or neighborhood-led spaces for interaction, for example encouraging block parties and neighborhood meetings, is an additional way *Wenham Connects* could help foster social participation among residents of all ages given the limited physical spaces available.

The next steps for *Wenham Connects* will be to engage with residents and stakeholders to develop an action-planning process. The information and suggestions provided in the report can be used to develop an action plan and activities. The suggestions and needs are meant to act as a guide and tool and not a prescription or requirement for what actions follow.

## Resource List

Massachusetts Healthy Aging Community Profile, Wenham (Essex) (2018):

[https://mahealthyagingcollaborative.org/wp-content/themes/mhac/pdf/community\\_profiles/towncode320.pdf](https://mahealthyagingcollaborative.org/wp-content/themes/mhac/pdf/community_profiles/towncode320.pdf)

Open Spaces and Recreation Plan Update (2018):

[http://www.wenhamma.gov/boards\\_and\\_committees/open\\_space\\_and\\_recreation\\_committee.php](http://www.wenhamma.gov/boards_and_committees/open_space_and_recreation_committee.php)

Town of Wenham Annual Report (2017):

[http://www.wenhamma.gov/important\\_documents/docs/WENHAM%202017%20TR-WEB%20COPY.pdf](http://www.wenhamma.gov/important_documents/docs/WENHAM%202017%20TR-WEB%20COPY.pdf)

Town of Wenham Housing Needs Assessment (2017):

[http://www.wenhamma.gov/boards\\_and\\_committees/docs/Wenham%20Housing%20Needs%20Assessment%202017%204-3.pdf](http://www.wenhamma.gov/boards_and_committees/docs/Wenham%20Housing%20Needs%20Assessment%202017%204-3.pdf)

Wenham Connects Community Forum Notes (2018)