



WalkBoston®

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Proposal to the Massachusetts Councils on Aging to prepare a brief Tool Kit:
Siting and Designing Senior Facilities to support Age-Friendly Walking

As elderly populations continue to grow across Massachusetts and the country, it is critical that facilities serving seniors are sited and designed with walkability in mind. Many seniors stop driving as they age, and for low-income seniors, auto ownership can be a burdensome expense. Walkability is one key to allowing seniors to age in community and to maintain good physical, cognitive and mental health, access important goods and services, remain socially and civically active, and maintain physical and economic mobility. Seniors are increasingly speaking up about the importance of living in walkable communities, as evidenced by A Place for Mom's 2017 Senior Living Preferences Survey (www.aplaceformom.com/blog/walkable-neighborhoods-for-seniors).

WalkBoston seeks \$10,000 in funding from MCOA to create a Tool Kit for municipalities, state agencies, developers, and community groups that describes how to incorporate walkability into siting and site design for senior facilities. Our April 2016 report *Walk to school? But how do I find the front door?* (www.walkboston.org/campus), prepared for the MA DPH, will serve as a model for this work. Drawing on our experience working with many Massachusetts communities, the *Walk to school? Report* shares strategies for improving pedestrian safety on school campuses, guiding readers through design decisions that any new campus plan must address for people arriving by foot, bike, bus or car.

Siting senior facilities in locations that maximize the potential for walkability requires intentional planning and design. Developers of senior housing are increasingly moving away from isolated suburban-style campus models towards more walkable models that are better integrated with the broader community. Guidance from the Environmental Protection Agency on school siting notes that "community decisions to site schools and make other investments influence housing and transportation choices, neighborhood vitality, economic development, the cost of providing local services, environmental quality, and overall community health and well-being" (www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/smart-school-siting-tool). The same holds true for senior facilities, and walkability is closely tied to all the aforementioned community development objectives.

Simply siting facilities in the correct location does not ensure safe and comfortable walking access. WalkBoston has found that even when communities build new schools in walkable, central areas, the design of school campuses may still favor vehicles over walkers in their site layout. Students walking to school are confronted with traffic congestion, unsafe crossings and circuitous routes to the front door. These same challenges hold true for older adults trying to access senior housing or senior centers.

MCOA is already supporting WalkBoston's Age-Friendly Walking efforts in the City of Boston. Our partnership to date has succeeded in embedding a recommendation to "improve pedestrian safety in partnership with Vision Zero" in the 2017 Age-Friendly Boston Action Plan. A corresponding action item calls for "employing a comprehensive, age-friendly strategy when re-

designing public spaces near high concentrations of older adults... [including] addressing sidewalks, crosswalks, signal timing, pedestrian ramps, places to rest, and shade.”

The walkability issues described above are often determining factors with respect to whether or not seniors feel safe and secure walking in their communities. When these issues are addressed, streets and sidewalks become more welcoming and accessible places for people of all ages. Our work on Age-Friendly Walking is fundamentally inspired by the credo of the 8-80 cities movement: “We believe that if everything we do in our cities is great for an 8 year old and an 80 year old, then it will be great for all people” (www.880cities.org).

With MCOA’s further support, developing a brief Tool Kit about Age-Friendly site selection and site planning will enable WalkBoston to provide guidance in accomplishing such objectives to all Massachusetts’ cities and towns.