

Livable Communities



May 1, 2006

I am the Director of a project called Aging Atlanta, sponsored by the Atlanta Regional Commission and funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

-Livable Communities are really the only kind of communities in which older adults can live.

-Fundamental to the concept of livable communities for older adults is Independence. Older adults both want and need to remain independent, able to live in their homes and communities as long as possible.

But most communities in this country actually present significant barriers to independence.

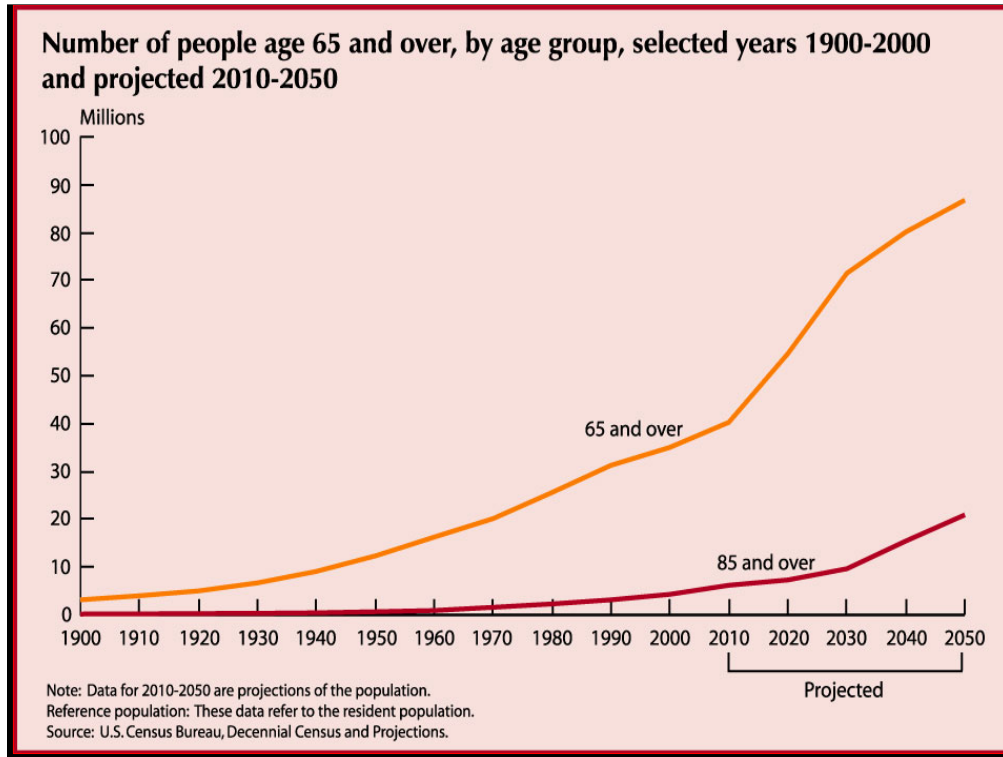
-Many communities are completely auto dependent.

-Develop uniformly with a single housing type

-Planning and development which does not incorporate the age of residents living in the community.

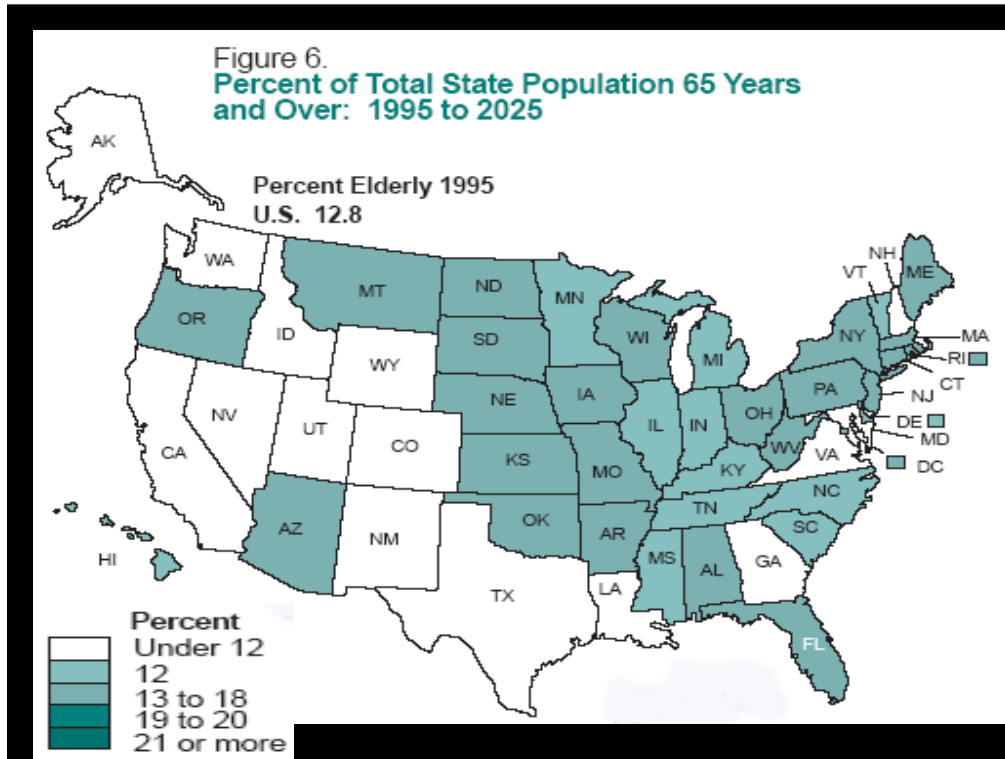
-Services which are too often separate and distinct, while the needs of older adults remain integrated.

Livable Communities for older adults are not communities in which there are street signs like these posted on the corner. But they are communities in which there is a physical reflection of all residents' needs, regardless of their age.

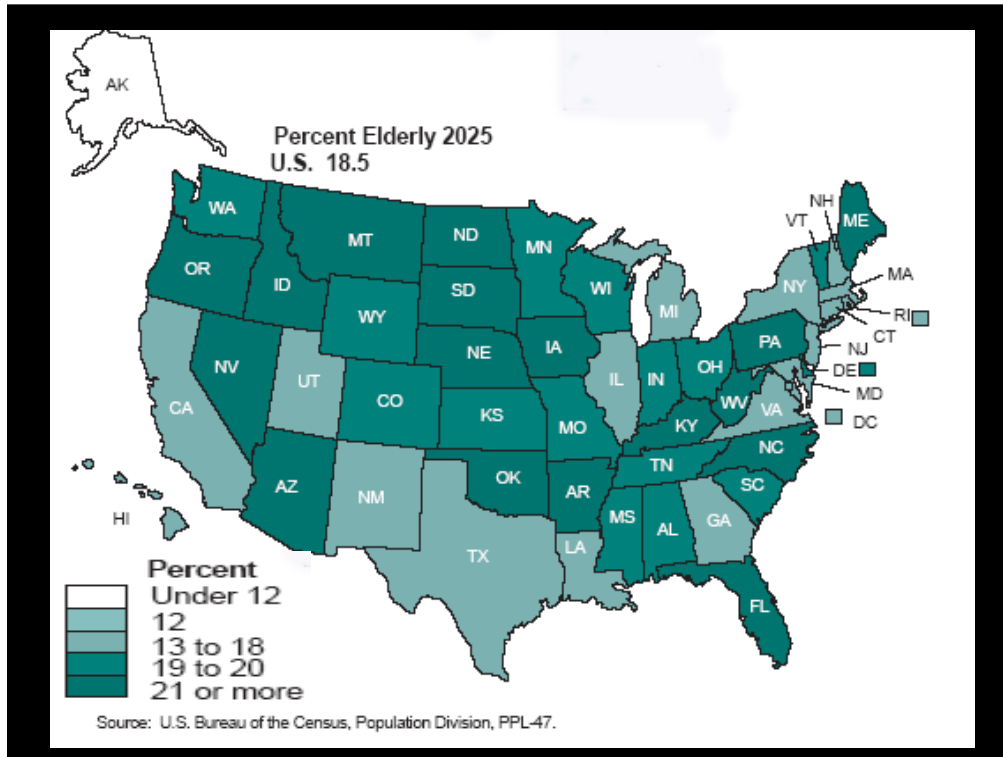


Beyond the health consequences which Dr. Frumkin has already discussed, the rapidly changing demographics provide a compelling reason to examine the importance of livable communities.

The older adult population in this country will double over the coming years and by 2030, 1 in 5 Americans will be over the age of 60.

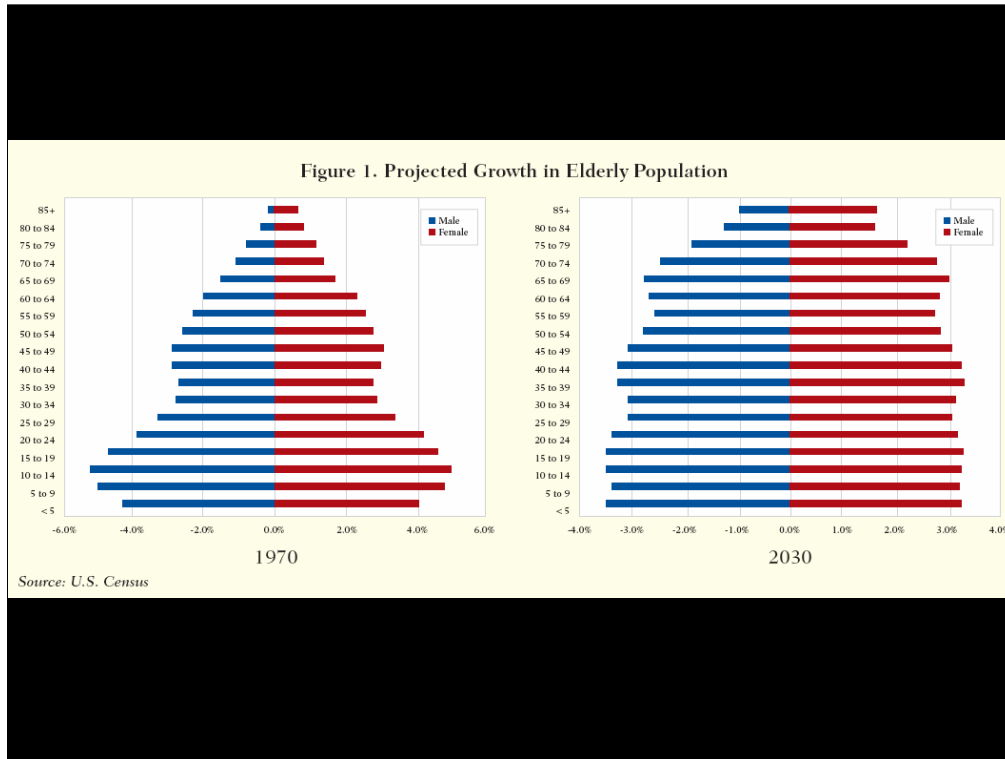


Every state is going to experience this change. This graph compares the percent of the older adult population by state in 1995.



By 2025, there are no more “white states” left. Every state in the country will experience significant growth and many, like Georgia will experience this growth very quickly, over a short period of time.

Because this growth will occur very rapidly, it makes it even more important to be proactive— reacting is really not an option.



Beyond just growth, in the very immediate future we will experience a fundamental shift in the population structure. Moving from the population structure on the left to the population structure on the right, will actually realign communities, impacting the workforce, the availability of family and informal caregivers.

Given the numbers and the changing population structure, we simply won't be able to afford to care for older adults in the same way. Beyond older adults' preference to remain independent, keeping older adults active, healthy and independent is really the only way society can care for them.



More and more older adults are clamoring for a new kind of independence. More and more they want to be Tina Turner, not John Singer Sargent's mother.

This independence does not mean they are free from everyone else in the community– it is a life in which older adults can remain in their own homes, still engage in the community after they can no longer drive, continue to contribute to the community either by working or by volunteering.

But for too many older adults, the choice to follow Tina's example is not a simple decision. Without changes to the community's design, infrastructure and services, an individual's address can determine how they will age.

Communities that promote independence:

- *Transportation Options*
- *Diverse Housing Stock*
- *Comprehensive Planning*
- *Integration of Services*



Communities that are livable for older adults have to reflect the full and diverse range of older adults. From Tina Turner to these two empty nesters who have decided to hit the open road to...

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... to Ms. Franklin in this picture who, because of some recent home modifications will be able to stay in her home caring for her grandchildren.

Livable Communities for older adults are communities which address four issues and tackle barriers in four areas:

- Transportation options
- Diverse Housing Stock
- Comprehensive Planning
- Integration of services across sectors

I want to discuss each of the four areas and then tell you about some of the ways we are addressing these issues in Atlanta, through the Aging Atlanta project.



To put it quite simply— transportation for older adults is not going well.

Transportation for older adults is a lot like the women in this picture, scared, stuck without options, the future looks grim and they are not clear how they will survive.

Opportunities:

- 1) Provide Alternatives**
- 2) Make roads and drivers as safe as possible**
- 3) Increase opportunity to walk**



There are significant opportunities to address these problems with transportation for older adults. And they generally fall into three categories (discuss three categories on slide)



A photograph of the front of a white MARTA bus. The bus has "marta" and the number "178" on the top. A sign in the window says "AIRPORT". A digital display at the bottom of the bus shows "MARTA" in green. The bus is on a road with trees in the background.

- Paratransit in high density areas
- Transit Training
- Transportation Vouchers
- Flex Routes
- Improving Pedestrian Environment

In Atlanta we are working with the local public transit system to explore how we can provide increased transportation services in areas where there is a high density of older adults. By simply coordinating paratransit rides, for older residents living in the same highrise, headed to the same destination- paratransit rides are both cheaper for the transit agency and the older adults.

We are also following a project in started in Denver, which trains older adults how to use public transit, particularly if they find themselves at age 75, without the ability to drive and riding the bus for the first time.

**East Point, GA
VOUCHER PROGRAM**

**\$9.60 Cost/Destination
\$16.16 Cost/Round trip**

- Paratransit in high density areas
- Transit Training
- Transportation Vouchers
- Flex Routes
- Improving Pedestrian Environment

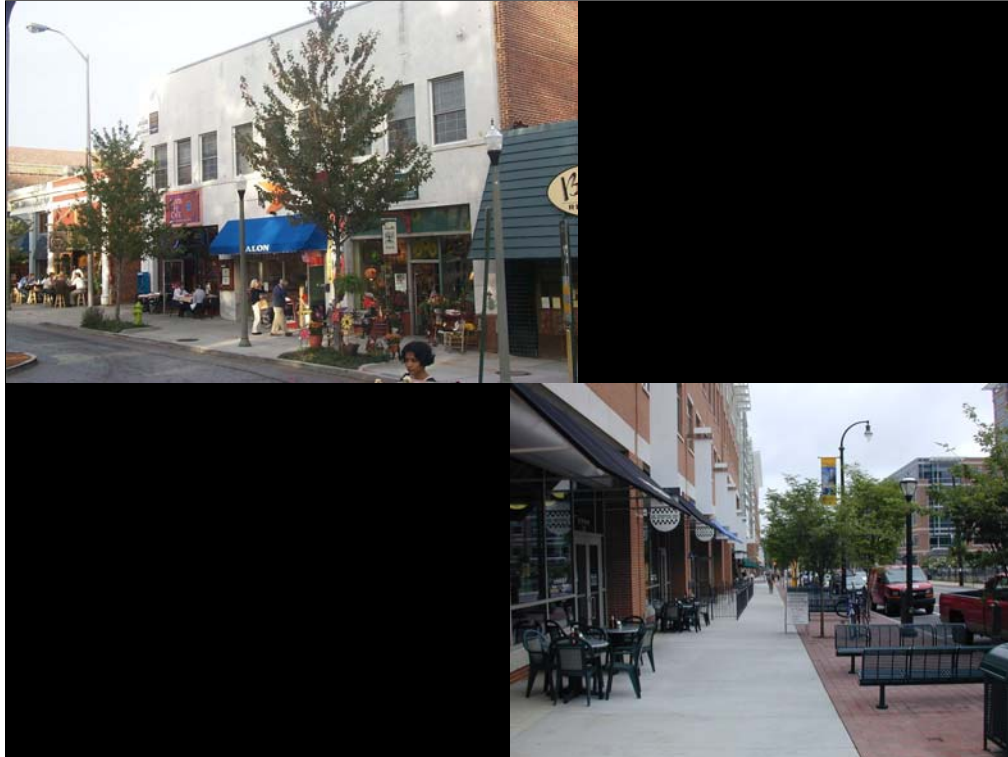
In Atlanta we've also started transportation voucher programs which provide older adults with a set amount of funds which they can then use in anyway they'd like—hire friends, family to drive them, ride the bus or train or take a cab. Older adults choose where they want to go, when they want to go and consistently these services are cheaper than the traditional van services that take older adults to the doctor's office or senior center.

We are also working with one county to examine how we can flex existing public transit routes during the off peak hours (10-3) to better meet the needs of older adults.



- **Paratransit in high density areas**
- **Transit Training**
- **Transportation Vouchers**
- **Flex Routes**
- **Improving Pedestrian Environment**

A number of local communities in the Atlanta region have committed to working with us to change their physical infrastructure including integrating countdown cross walks like these.



DIVERSE HOUSING STOCK:

Communities which integrate housing and other community amenities- like grocery stores, coffee shops, banks and post offices provide the kind of environment in which older adults can age in place.

It is particularly important that communities provide a range of housing types so that older adults can downsize but remain in the communities they have lived often for 20 and 30 years.

In Atlanta over 35% of older adults have lived in their existing residence for over 30 years.



In Atlanta, these condos were built in a downtown, walkable community and without any age restrictions or marketing, over half the residents are over the age of 55.

Aging Atlanta has been working with local jurisdictions to change zoning policies to insure that a wide range of housing stock is available throughout a community, particularly in areas where there are high concentrations of older adults. Policies have been changed in 2 counties and 1 city. There are two more zoning changes in the development process.

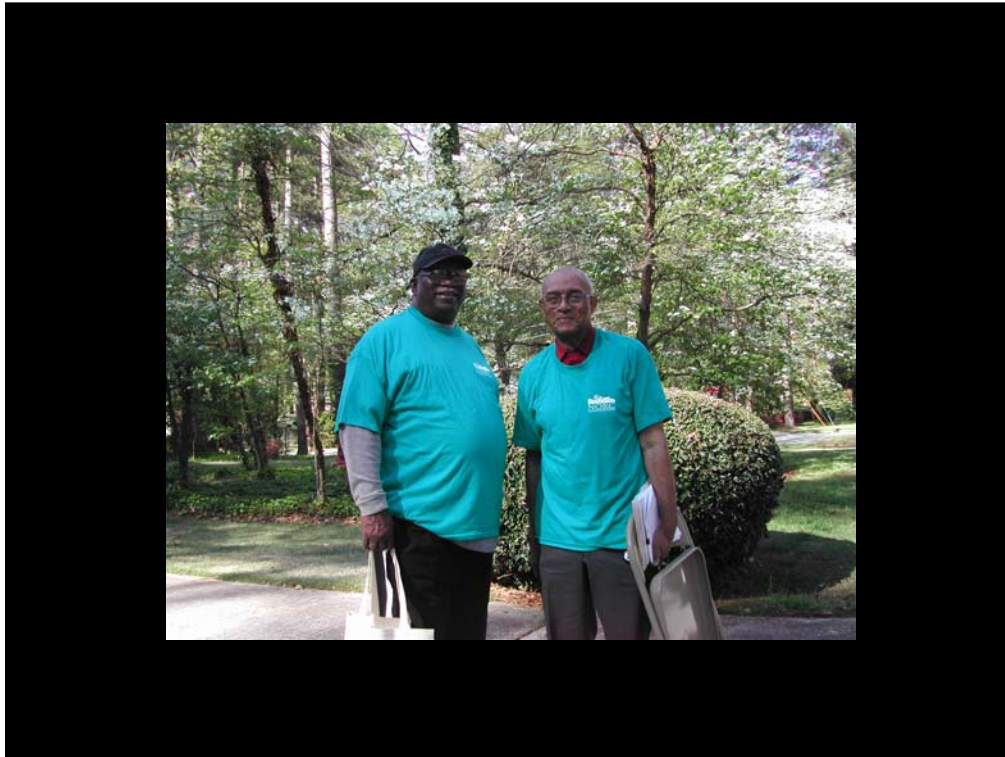


COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING:

There are two problems with the way planning is currently done:

- Comprehensive planning goes on out without attention to the needs of older adults.
- Planning for older adult services occurs without any attention to the physical environment.

We worked with a group of older adults in East Point, Georgia, just outside of Atlanta, to identify concerns with their community. Using maps and GIS technology, older adults were able to describe their needs and concerns in the physical context of the community.



This resulted in a series of programs including a neighborhood based walking club led by these two men– Griff Askew and Ben Howard

Older adults had discussed their feelings of isolation– citing, that they didn't know their neighbors anymore. At the same time, many were concerned about their weight and rising blood pressure. In partnership with the neighborhood association, this group of older adults formed a walking club. It meets 3 times a week and the police or fire department accompanies the walkers. They are tracking their blood pressure and now wear pedometers every day to track their steps. They have the opportunity to socialize and are even planning neighborhood pot luck dinners.



Working with a team of older adults we are identifying key areas of the physical environment which pose significant barriers to older adult mobility. This group of 15 older adults surveyed over 700 older adults in the community– going door to door and even when necessary finding older adults in the produce section of the grocery store.

They have compiled this data and developed a series of recommendations which they are now presenting to the mayors and city council people of the various municipalities. Already they have gotten street signs installed which indicate upcoming intersections and are currently making improvements to crosswalks.

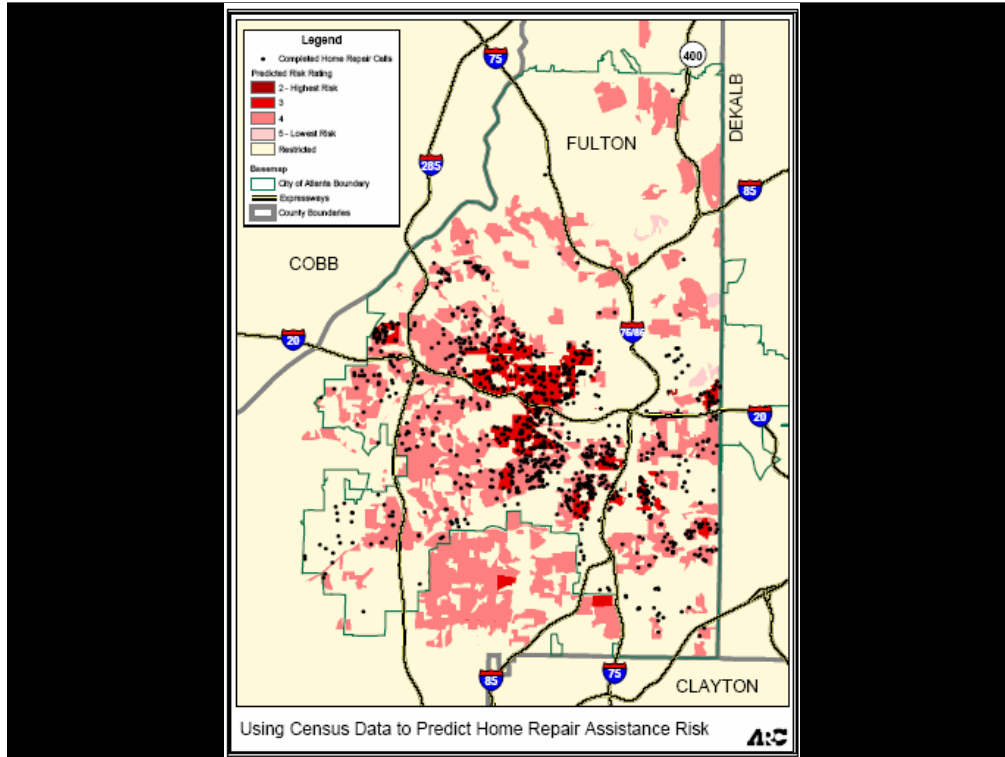


INTEGRATION OF SERVICES:

Right now, community based healthcare and supportive services are separated by function, by funding and by reporting requirements. However, individuals' needs do not fall along such clearly delineated lines. Bringing these services together is critical if a community is to provide comprehensive community based services for older adults as a viable option to institutionalization.

The Health Systems Partnership in Atlanta that is bringing together community based providers through web based software system. The system allows providers to communicate about clients they share insuring that real time information is exchanged in away that can improve the quality of service for older adults.

Already there is evidence of reduced duplication of services and enhanced problem solving that has shortened or eliminated expensive medical crises.



We are also working to integrate services into the comprehensive planning process. This map is just one example of how we are using GIS technology to integrate service data with planning data.

In this project Aging Atlanta developed a multi-variable weighted analysis to predict where residents in the City of Atlanta live who might be at risk for home repair and modification. Then we overlaid 3 years of data from a program which is currently providing home repair. You can see that the black dots match up quite nicely with the red to pink areas that indicated need. Now using this methodology we have been able to advocate better for resources and target those resources in areas which have some of the greatest need.



Well Planned Neighborhoods

A quality of life issue for all residents

A necessity of life issue for older adults

In summary– well planned neighborhoods and well planned services are essential for creating livable communities in which older adults can age in place. Without transportation options, a diverse housing stock, comprehensive planning that is really comprehensive and integrated service delivery systems, older adults will be forced to move, will become more dependent on expensive services and require more of this country's increasingly limited healthcare dollars.



Why is this so hard???

This image is not the ideal Livable Community for older adults– but it does reflect the current situation: every program is an island unto itself. It can be extremely difficult and sometimes impossible to bring different programs and service sectors together because of funding requirements, language barriers and too many individuals and industries invested in the way things have always been done.

In Atlanta our work has only been possible because we are grant funded through the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and others. This private funding allows us to be flexible and take the time to bring together the necessary partners, even if none of them have ever worked together. These partnerships have been the key to our success.

At the federal level we need a series of changes to insure that we can promote and develop livable communities for older adults across this country:

Greater flexibility in the Medicaid program

More coordination across transportation programs

And a recent proposal by the National Assoc of Area Agencies on Aging- funding and a mandate to plan for the rapidly growing older adult population



We have the opportunity to invest NOW to make a difference that will pay off for many decades, but this opportunity won't exist for much longer

We can re-imagine community in a way that has never been possible before..



...creating the kind of communities in which all people would like to live, allowing people of all ages to realize their dreams for their future.

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