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# Bethel Area Community Survey

*The Age-Friendly Community Project*



 ANALYTIC INSIGHT

*January 18, 2016*

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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Analytic Insight would like to thank the members of the Age-Friendly Community Project team who are working to make the Bethel area more age-friendly and ensure residents can age in place with comfort and dignity.

Eliza Barnes, Allen Cressy, Jacquelyn Cressy, Nancy Davis, Kay Larson, Linda McDonough, Janet Stowell, Rosabelle Tiff and Judy Whitman spearheaded the initiative to increase the area's support for healthy aging and thereby improve the well-being, satisfaction and quality of life for older residents.

The survey was funded through the AARP's Age-Friendly Community Initiative. More than three dozen communities representing more than a dozen states are enrolled in the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities. Bethel is the sixth town in Maine to be accepted into the program.

At Analytic Insight, we congratulate the Town of Bethel on its good work so far, and wish you the best as you continue to make the Bethel area more age-friendly so that residents of all ages can participate fully in the Maine philosophy of "life the way it should be."

Sincerely,



Amy Flowers  
President, Analytic Insight  
January 18, 2016

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The goal of the project is to help the Bethel area and its town leaders better understand the needs of older residents and support healthy aging of all residents. This study was developed and administered by a team of volunteers working within the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities Program. Analytic Insight, a research firm based in Lewiston, was hired to compile the survey results and develop this report.

This Executive Summary summarizes the findings presented in the full report, and is designed to help guide the strategic planning and program implementation efforts of the Town of Bethel and its neighboring communities.

### METHODS

Surveys were distributed through open meetings, at local senior citizen groups and throughout the greater Bethel area. Printed surveys were available at the town offices of Bethel, Newry, Greenwood and Woodstock, the Bethel Public Library, the Bethel Family Health Center, the Whitman Library, churches, the food pantry and district exchange, several subsidized housing locations, at the grocery store and at other public locations. Surveys were also distributed directly through the network of volunteers. A total of 221 completed surveys were collected from eleven communities:

COMPLETED SURVEYS	
Town	Surveys Received
Albany Township	9
Andover	2
Bethel	121
East Bethel	1
Gilead	4
Greenwood	31
Hanover	7
Mason Township	2
Newry	14
West Bethel	3
Woodstock/Bryant Pond	27
<b>Total</b>	<b>221</b>



Transportation was the main issue driving residents' concern about aging in the Bethel area. A substantial percentage of respondents (42.3%) said needing more accessible transportation would be a factor in their decision to move from the area as they age. Half of respondents (50.7%) said needing help with health care or household tasks would impact their decision to move.

Concerns about transportation crossed all subgroups, such as gender, income, or residence, those with and without disabilities, men and women and Bethel area residents as well those of surrounding areas. Help with household chores, home healthcare and support were of special concern to those living in surrounding areas.

Respondents who are seasonal rather than year-round residents were more concerned than others with obtaining easily accessible sources of information regarding services for older adults. Reaching out to this group with information may help increase participation and support for community initiatives.

### **ANTICIPATING CHANGES IN DEMAND FOR SERVICES: THE NEXT FIVE YEARS**

Transportation was the greatest concern for residents thinking about aging in the Bethel community.

Other issues of importance that emerged include access to home care services, particularly in surrounding areas, a community center and affordable housing.

Older respondents (65 and over) were somewhat more likely to express concern about the availability of specialists, medical services and access to venues for physical exercise. The effort to make the Bethel area a more age-friendly community needs to address both the availability of these services, as well as the transportation to make them accessible.

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## INTRODUCTION

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This study began with the initiative of Bethel residents. A team of volunteers working with the Town of Bethel applied for, and was accepted into, the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities Program. This team of volunteers developed and administered the survey. Analytic Insight, a research firm based in Lewiston, was hired to compile the survey results and develop this report.

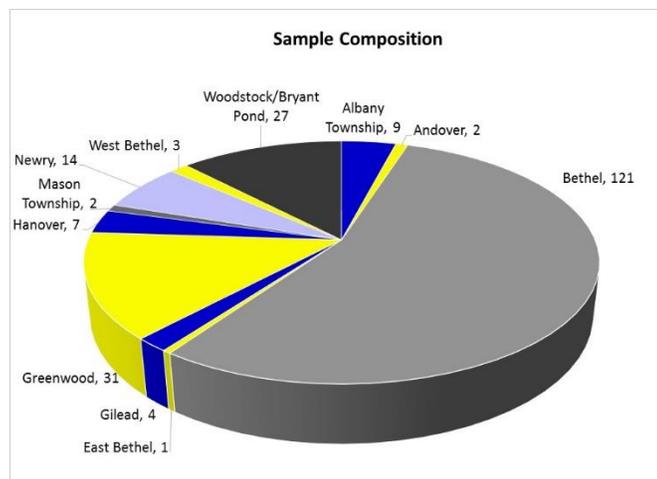
The goal of the project is to help Bethel area residents and their town leaders better understand the needs of older residents and support the healthy aging of all residents. This report presents the findings of the survey and is designed to help guide the strategic planning and program implementation efforts of the Town of Bethel and its neighboring communities.

## SURVEY METHODS

The survey was developed by a group of volunteers who studied several other surveys including one developed by AARP. The survey was structured to collect information about a set of nine livability factors, based on the AARP domains for community livability.

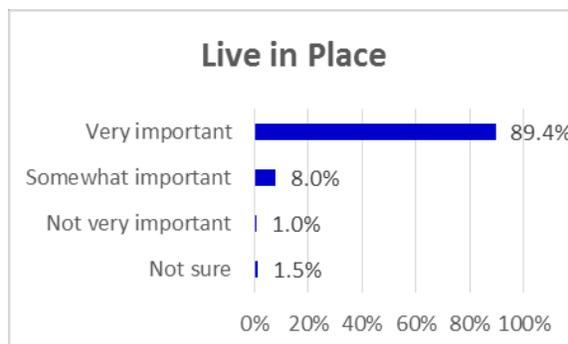
Surveys were distributed through open meetings to discuss the livability factors, at local senior citizen groups and throughout the Bethel area. Printed surveys were available at the town offices of Bethel, Newry, Greenwood and Woodstock, the Bethel Public Library, the Bethel Family Health Center, the Whitman Library, churches, the food pantry and district exchange, several subsidized housing locations, at the grocery store and at other public locations. Surveys were also distributed directly through the network of volunteers.

620 copies of the survey were printed and 221 completed surveys were collected from eleven communities.

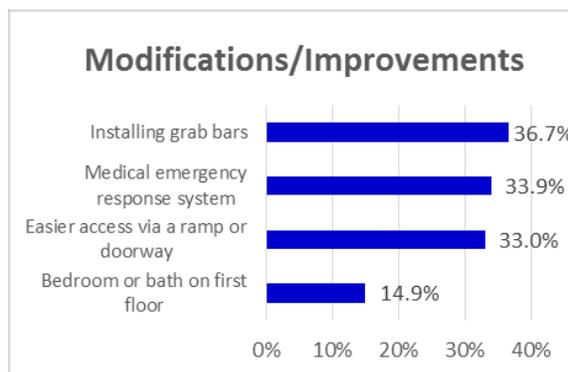


## LIVING INDEPENDENTLY

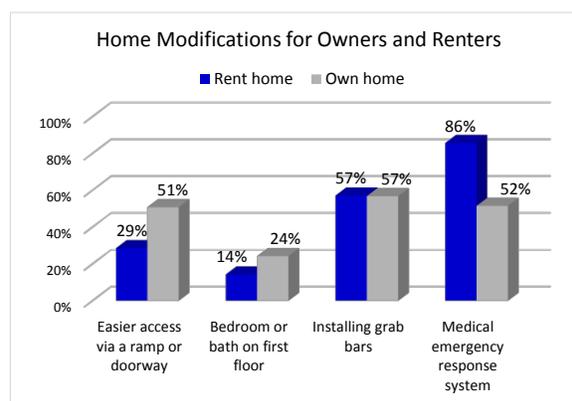
Nine in ten respondents (89.4%) said that it is very important for them to be able to live independently in their home as they age. A very small percentage said it was not very important (1%) or that they were unsure (1.5%). The majority of respondents valued living in place whether they are currently working or not, living in a single family home or apartment and for renters as well as those who own their own home.



Overall just over half of respondents think they will need to make some kind of modifications to their home as they age. About one in three said they thought they would need to install grab bars (36.7%), a medical emergency response system (33.9%), or create easier access by installing a ramp or wider doorways (33%). About 15% said they may need to put a bedroom or bathroom on the first floor.



Respondents who are homeowners are more likely to say they are likely to add a ramp or doorway, or put a bedroom or bath on the first floor than those respondents who rent their home. Renters and those who own their home are equally likely to consider installing grab bars, and renters are somewhat more likely to say they will be interested in an emergency medical response system. Note the small sample size of renters (N=7) requires caution in interpreting this finding.



## AGING IN PLACE

### Desire vs. Need to Move to a New Home

Most respondents (57.6%) said it is not very likely that they will want to move to a different home as they age. Just one in ten (9.2%) said it was very likely they would want to move.

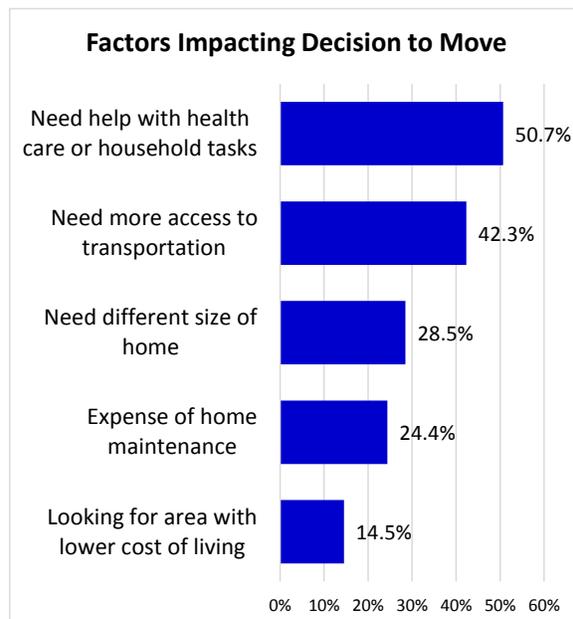
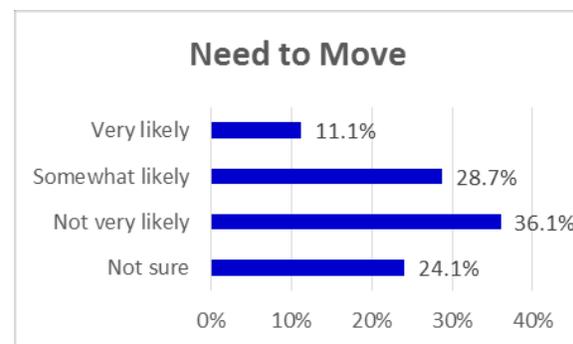
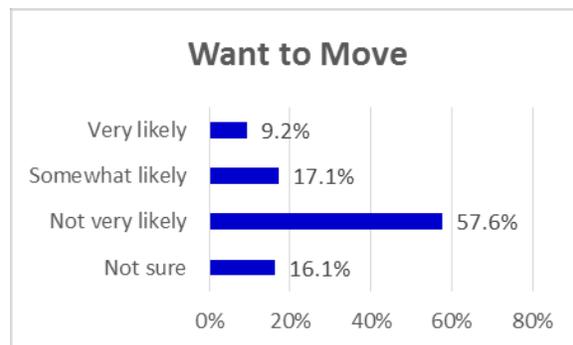
Respondents were more likely to anticipate that they will need to move than that they will want to move. Although a similar percentage say it is very likely they will need to move (11.1% need vs. 9.2% want), they are more likely to say that it is somewhat likely they will need to move (28.7%) as compared to very likely that they will want to move (17.1%). Although over half of respondents say it is not very likely they will want to move (57.6%), just one in four (24.1%) say that it is not very likely they will need to move.

### Factors in the Decision to Move

Half of respondents (50.7%) said needing help with health care or household tasks would impact their decision to move and almost half (42.3%) said needing more accessible transportation would be a factor.

About one in four said needing a different home size that meets their needs (28.5%) or the expense of home maintenance (24.4%) would be factors in their decision.

Just 14.5%, or about one in seven respondents, said that they would look for an area with a lower cost of living.



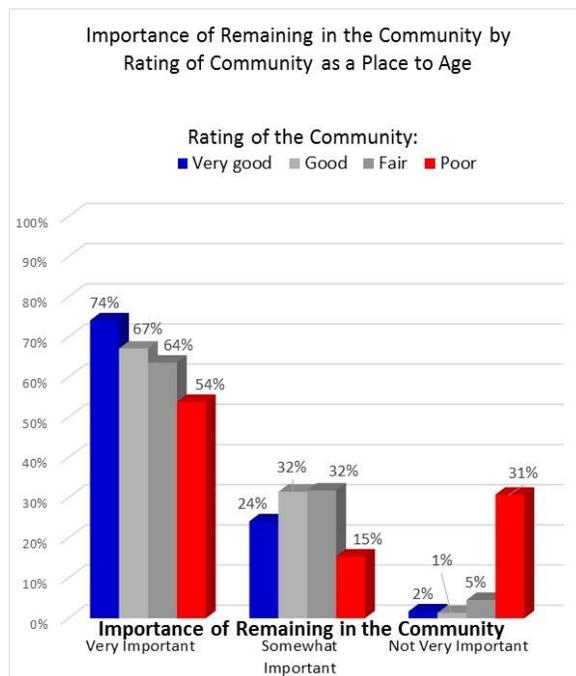
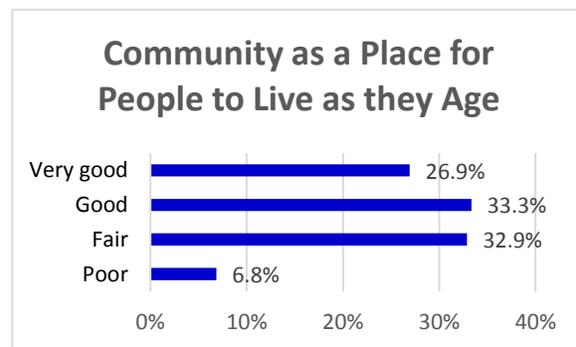
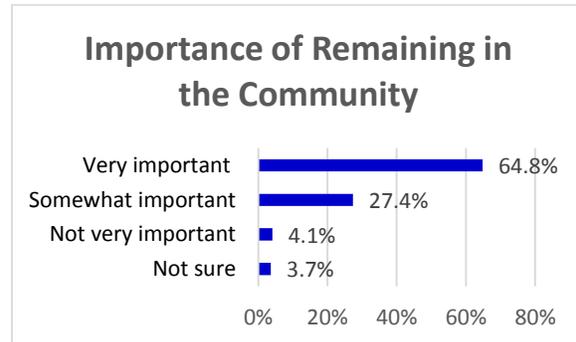
## THE BETHEL AREA COMMUNITY AS A PLACE TO AGE

The vast majority of respondents (92.2%) said it was somewhat or very important to remain in their community as they age, with almost two out of three (64.8%) saying it was very important.

The majority of respondents said the Bethel area is a good (33.3%) or fair (32.9%) place for people to live as they age. One in four respondents (26.9%) said their community is a very good place to age. Less than one in ten (6.8%) rated the Bethel area as a poor place to age.

Respondents who rated their own community as a place to age favorably were more likely to say that it is very important to remain in the community as they age.

In contrast, among those who rated their community as a poor place to age, one in three (31%) said that it was not very important to remain. Very small percentages of those who found their community to be very good, good or fair said that it was not very important to remain. Residents' belief that the community is a good place to age strongly impacts their belief in the importance of remaining. This finding is statistically significant at the .01 level, which means there is less than 1% chance of it being found by chance.

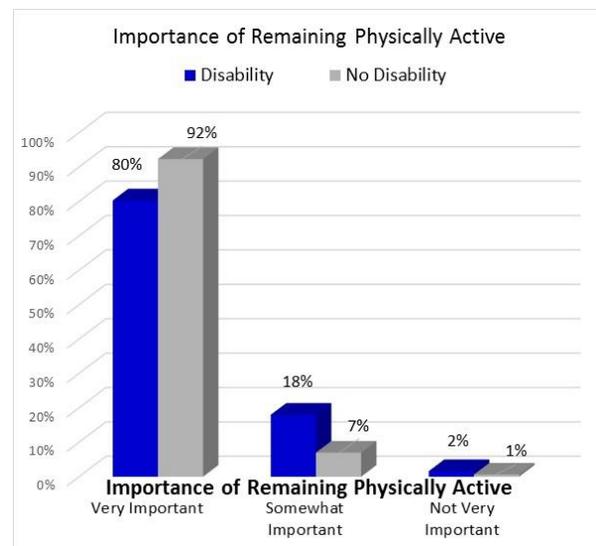
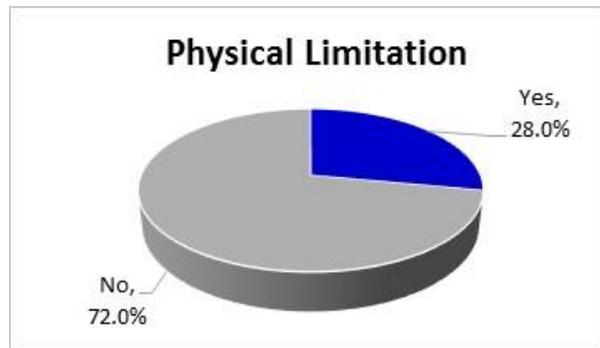
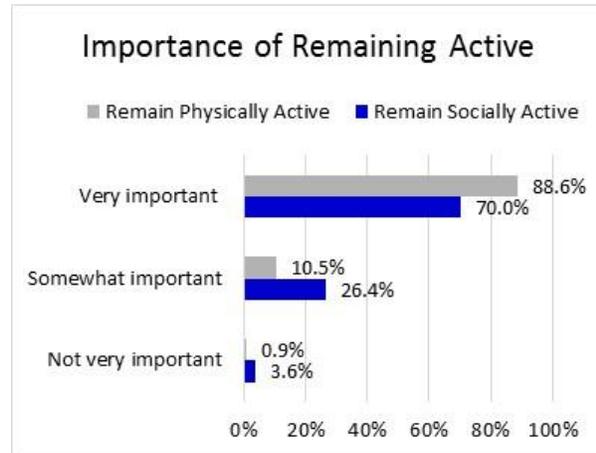


## IMPORTANCE OF REMAINING ACTIVE

Respondents assign a greater importance to remaining physically active than socially active, although overall, both are seen as very important by a majority of respondents (88.6% think remaining physically active is very important vs. 70% socially active).

Just over one in four respondents (28%) said that they have a physical limitation, handicap disability or chronic disease that limits their participation in self-care, house work or other activities. Respondents who have a physical limitation were more likely to prioritize improvements in access to public buildings than those who do not have a physical limitation.

No significant differences were found in respondents' rating of their community as a place to live between those who have a disability and those who do not. Respondents who have a disability were significantly less likely to say that remaining physically active is very important; however, the majority of both groups said remaining active is very important (80% vs. 92%).

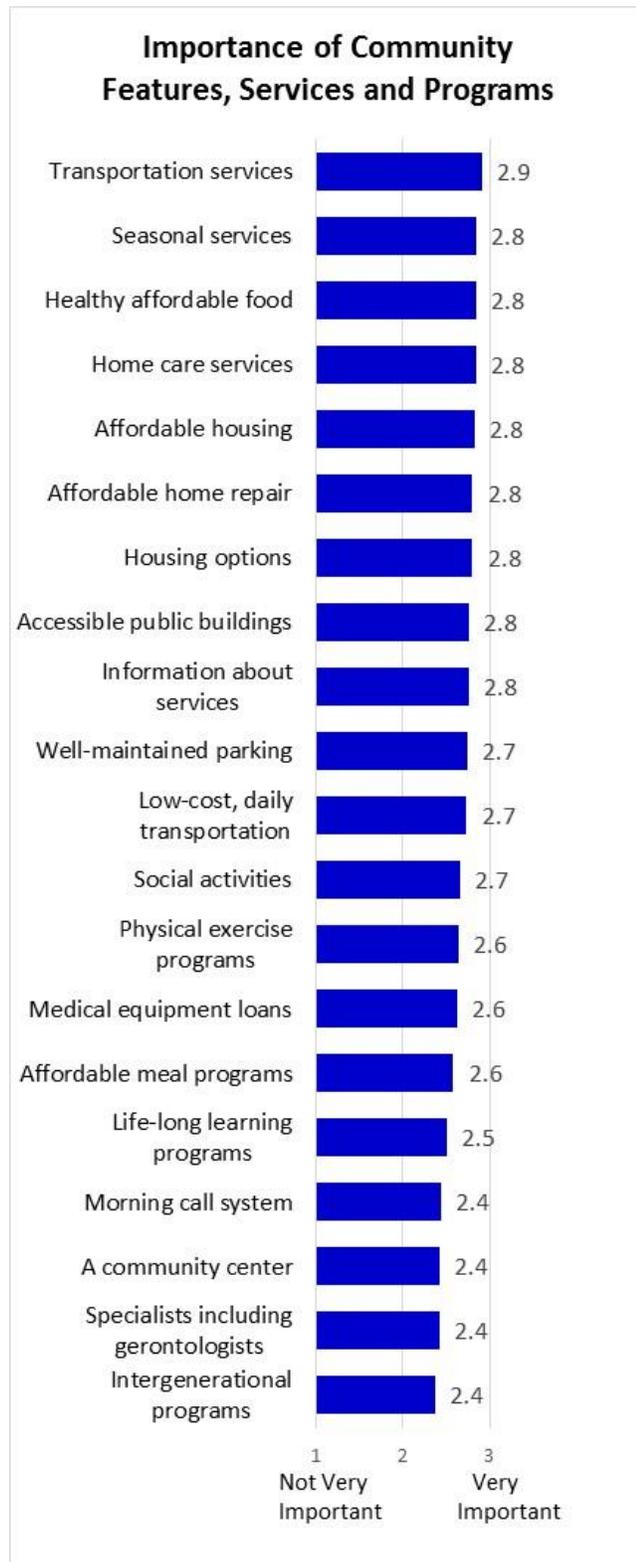


## MOST IMPORTANT SERVICES

Respondents were asked to rate a number of items according to how important they think it is to have each item in the community. Items were rated on a scale of one to three as very important (3), somewhat important (2) or not very important (1).

Respondents rated all the features, services or programs between somewhat and very important (between 2.0 and 3.0) with the average about halfway between somewhat and very important (2.7).

Transportation services were rated as most important (2.9 on a scale of one to three). Seasonal services were also rated as very important (2.8). These include lawn work or snow removal for older adults and those with disabilities, access to healthy, affordable food, home care services including health, personal care and housekeeping, affordable housing options, affordable home repair/modification services for low income and older adults, public buildings with ramps, non-slip flooring and accessible washrooms and easily accessible sources of information regarding services for older adults.



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## PROVIDING FOR SENIORS

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When asked how well the community provides for its seniors in several areas, respondents rated opportunities to volunteer and educational and social opportunities most favorably (2.4, respectively).

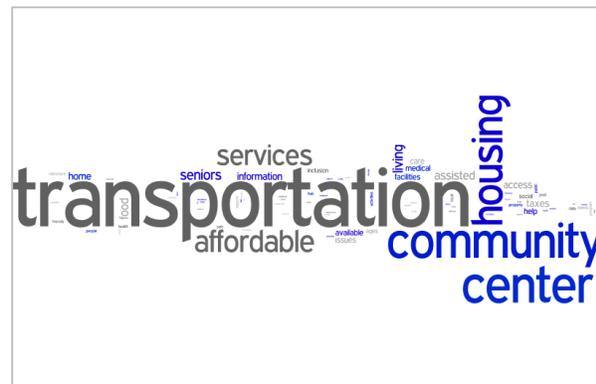
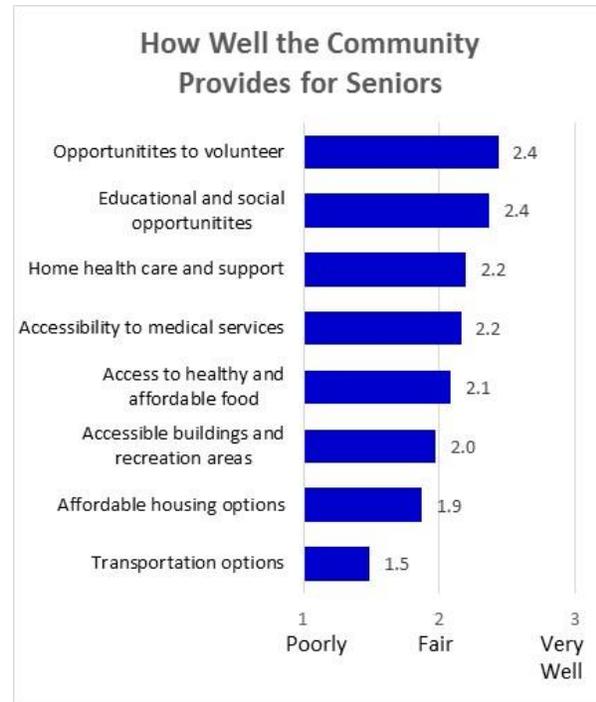
Affordable housing options was rated as fair (1.9) and transportation options was rated least favorably of the items, half-way between poorly and fair (1.5).

Transportation services were rated as the most important local service, and also rated least favorably. When a service is rated as very important, but the current provision of the service is rated at a low level of satisfaction, this is an indication that community leaders may want to prioritize that service.

In addition to transportation services, affordable housing options was also rated high in importance, but relatively low (fair) in satisfaction.

### MOST CRITICAL ISSUES

The graphic to the right is a word cloud. It shows the words used by respondents when asked to name the most critical issues that need improvement to make the Bethel area more age-friendly. The larger the word appears, the more times it was used. The most commonly named critical issue is transportation. A community center and affordable housing were also frequently mentioned.



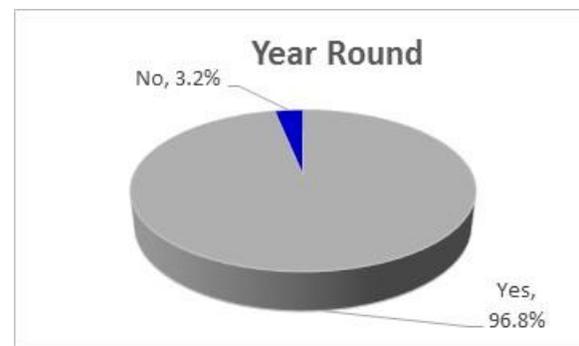
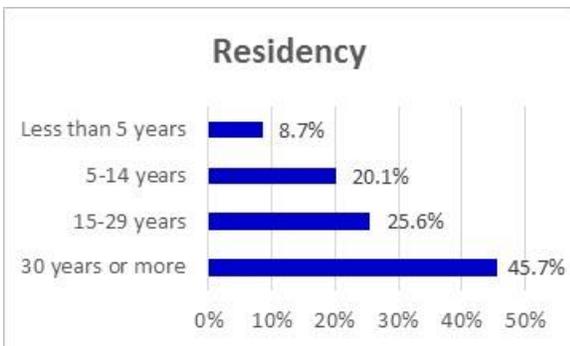
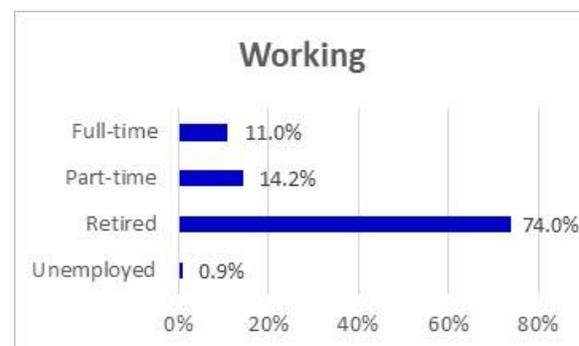
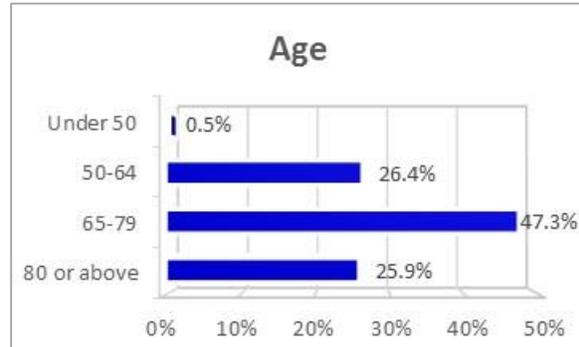
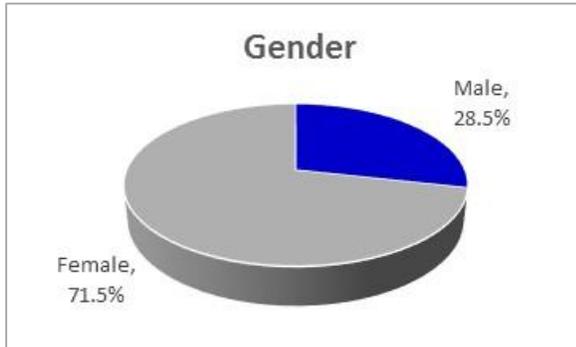
## **MOST IMPORTANT SERVICES TO ENABLE SENIORS TO CONTINUE TO LIVE IN THE BETHEL COMMUNITY AREA**

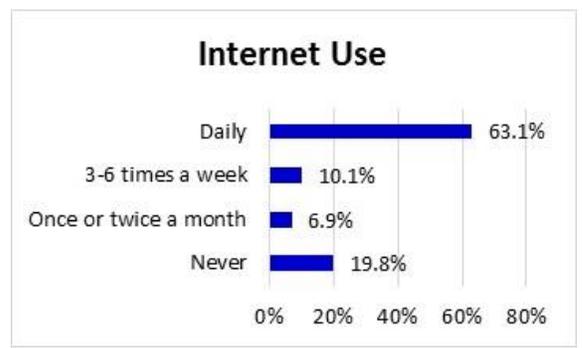
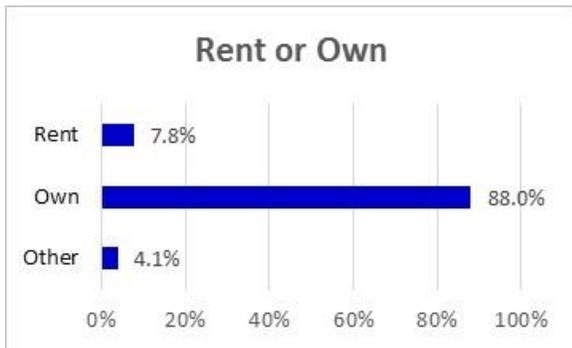
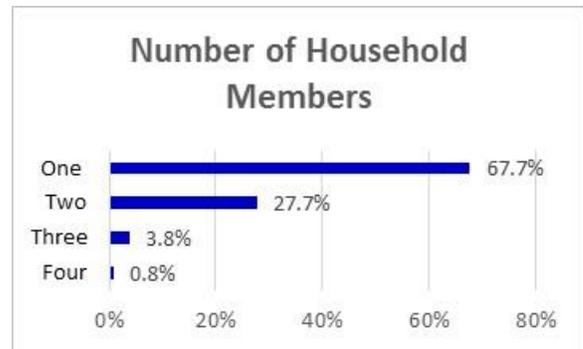
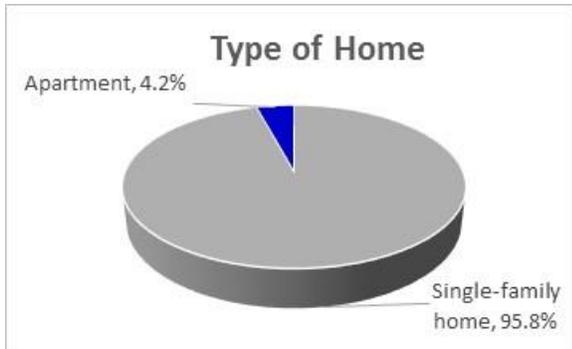
The survey asked respondents to name the three most important services that need to be available to allow them to continue to live in the Bethel area. Transportation was named by the majority of respondents (144 individuals), followed by home maintenance services (named by 41 individuals) and affordable housing (40 individuals).

<b>Service</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
Transportation	144
Home maintenance services	41
Affordable housing	40
Medical services	33
Social activities	31
Home medical services	30
Health care	29
Healthy food access/Grocery Store	19
Community center	15
Assisted living	7
Meals On Wheels or Food Bank	7
Educational opportunities	6
Tax relief	5
Information	5
Activities for physical exercise	5
Snow removal	4
Daily checks or call system	4
Internet access	3
Heating Assistance	3
Emergency services	2
Dental clinic	2
Volunteer opportunities	2
Hospice	1
Delivery service	1
Intergenerational activities	1

## DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESPONDENTS

The charts in this section show the demographic composition of the respondents to the survey.





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## APPENDIX: GENERAL COMMENTS

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The following comments were received in answer to the last question of the survey, which asked "What have we left out? What other comments or suggestions would you like to make?"

1) Property taxes on seniors should not keep rising when income is static. 2) No income tax on seniors making less than \$30,000 a year and adjustments to be made if food prices increase. 3) Communication to seniors of benefits available be made clear in forums, classes, special meetings or individually by qualified financially trained consultants.

1) Would like to see a Time-Bank instituted so people would share skills and knowledge without money being exchanged. 2) Would REALLY like to have a Community Center (or Senior Center) where seniors could come for classes, meals, or just hang out. 3) I wish there were some way to bring the whole senior community together. There are "forgotten" seniors - how do we make them feel a part of the community.

A lot of things. People to help the elderly out. Sweep, some meals, make bed, visit overnight. This is what would help me. Thank you.

A means of finding out what is available for age-friendly environment.

AARP should lobby for state income tax to be eliminated

Affordable food

Although my husband and I are healthy and independent at this point, we need a safe place to walk for exercise in the winter months. Could either Telstar High School or Gould Academy be part of an age-friendly community by making a part of their facility open to elders for indoor walking? We would use it - at any time it would be available! Thanks!

Assisted living facilities and nursing homes.

Be Maine, not out of State

Bethel does a wonderful job with activities. One could stay busy all the time. This "Age-Friendly Community Project" once again shows what an incredible community we are lucky enough to live in. I think this is one of the many reasons we all want to stay and die here. We are "Shangri-La" and our thanks to all of you who work so hard to keep it so. Internet connection very important in surrounding areas!!!

Bethel has cliques of people who are not friendly - do not speak, smile or communicate with you unless you are a member of their "group". The "Bethel Stare" is prevalent and hurtful to fellow neighbors.

Bethel need a senior center with an exercise area - aerobics, yoga, swimming, indoor/outdoor walking area, weights. Also, a game area (planned and casual) and for social gatherings.

Better senior discounts for fitness and recreation.

Cannot think of a lot so I guess it is OK. Sometimes a phone call just to see or hear how you are is nice.

Children should be raised by their communities. Families need pseudo-grandparents and extended families.

Communication and information are so important! The "To Your Health" program is important in this regard, and there should be additional opportunities to learn and gain skills to help us age well. What, currently, is our access to gerontological services? (I am not sure, but suspect little or non-existent.

Communication during power outages. Need land lines that will work in the case of an outage. Helping with reading gauge on oil tank, help with trash and affordability of taking to dump, getting water if well water isn't suitable for usage, bringing in firewood, getting packages from post office.

Could Ethel Bisbee School be considered as a part of age-friendly thinking? Housing? Senior center?

Emergency center or shelter in case of disaster. (Storm, hurricane.)

Equipment on loan (free) for those who need it.

Everything going well so far.

Excellent. Very thought-provoking. Looking forward to the development of the project.

Good job

Good Start

Great survey! Thank you!

Heating issues.

I am currently working with the Maine Arts Commission teaching art in assisted living facilities. I also teach sewing, cooking and knitting. A facility that would be open mornings and afternoons (unlike Adult Ed) to offer activities to encourage elders to congregate, learn new skills or hone an already acquired one is also a great way to socialize. The response from a group at Park Danforth in Portland is amazing. Drawing, painting, sculpting in clay.

I am glad you are getting a broad spectrum of surveys. I am not sure if this age-friendly plan will extend beyond the Town of Bethel. I live in Woodstock.

I am new to the area so I do not have a strong opinion on what is currently available. We are young for retired people, but hope to age comfortably and healthy in this community.

I appreciate the work of the group and the need for occasional meeting especially to get community participation. (Bravo!) I have a concern that the AARP approach is too broad and urban, as it does not have a focused approach to the challenges at hand. I am certain that someone has looked at the aging process, life after 65, and has quantified the "average" sequence and changing needs. Without teaching the community some model of the aging sequence, can anyone in the community focus on what we have and what we do not. Otherwise people will scatter their ideas and efforts in every direction without ever establishing a sound core program.

I hope the committee will eventually develop this beyond the "meetings" stage. It seems obvious to me that it will be necessary to hire someone to direct this effort. Too many times we talk about what we need but fall short of actually doing anything. This, especially is an overwhelming challenge and could lead to "burn-out" before establishing a fully-functional resource for elders.

I hope the good efforts you are pursuing will not be too institutional/bureaucratic but will focus on volunteerism and community orientation. We don't need more social agencies.

I really believe setting up a type of program that would help us find services is needed. It would be quick, cheap, and simple. I would urge you to consider this.

I suggest that you get word to the town that they are going to spend the money to re-pave streets that they also spend the money to raise "man holes", sewer and water covers and drains to the same level as the pavement. Also, Bethel is a two-tiered community. I know this grossly over-simplifies, but, there is one tier that includes the

Chamber, Historical Society, Senior College, West Parish Church, Paradise Hill, etc. and then there is everybody else whose opinions and participation are rarely sought.

I think that takes care of it all.

I think that your program is a great asset to the seniors in my area. If things can get better it would benefit all.

I think the most likely concept left out is that there are a less affluent, less educated group of seniors that have different needs and wants than the group who has "more" that often is in control and represented in projects like this. It is important to include those with less as much as possible.

I think there needs to be more inter-generational opportunities. If some kind of senior housing is established could a day care center be linked? Other than home health it is possible to establish a group of volunteers who would visit single, home-bound seniors? This age-friendly effort absolutely needs to be expanded officially to the other towns. Is it possible for a grant to hire someone to advocate for this in other towns?

I would like to have people who would design accessible bathrooms. Like baseline dimensions that are needed to accommodate wheel chairs and how to make a shower that you could roll in by wheel chair. Heights of sinks and toilets and what is the smallest space that you need for such a bathroom. I think we need good sidewalks that connect to the pathway over the railroad tracks which is a bad area.

I would like to join this group as an active member.

I'd like to see more community gatherings/celebrations on days other than the Sabbath.

If a person is retired they should be able to get help through the county or state programs regardless of their financial income.

In my opinion, the most critical aspect of maintaining an independent lifestyle is being able to live out life in one's own home have been addressed. Personally, the issue of transportation in a very rural community looms large. For many of us, our children have moved out of state and are not available to help. And my own situation as a single person, includes the dilemma of close friends - who currently are my support system - aging as well. I see many job opportunities that could be created for younger folks to provide services for my generation - but will we be able to afford them?

In some towns the library becomes more of the community hub - a suggestion to explore if it could be appropriate to add to it and create more educational opportunities.

Increase opportunities for indoor low cost exercise venues and transportation to it. For outdoors, get a grant for exercise equipment at Dan's Park or some other public location. I have spoken to Gabe Perkins and he said they are working on a grant for this.

Intergenerational or elder housing scheme? Pets?

It would be good to see this published somewhere and I hope this was given to a good cross section of "seasoned" residents in a variety of income levels. Thanks for doing this.

It would be so nice to have town-wide trash pick up like other towns have.

Keep a grocery store on Main Street.

Most older people need occasional help with financial questions, IRS, retirement funds, insurance - and how to manage credit reporting, internet problems, choosing repair services, etc.

Need Affordable Transportation

Need more "senior friendly" restaurants, i.e., reasonable prices and healthy food. Would like to see an upgraded grocery store and train transportation to larger areas.

Nothing left out but we need support services.

Ongoing support and information about end-of-life issues. Having health care advocates available when attempting to navigate the health care system. Development of a list/database of volunteer opportunities for all ages which includes elder support services.

Our thanks to those that initiated this effort.

People affected by drugs affect their children. The cycle is repeated.

Please include SAD 44 adult education, not just Senior College in the report. Also, churches were kind of ignored throughout. The access to home internet via broadband is vital along with instruction on usage.

Property taxes.

Questionnaire makes it difficult to determine what is considered important for the aged in general or for you personally.

Quite thorough!
Senior Center
Since we live in an "outlying" area, transportation between towns would be helpful, not just to Portland, etc. In CO they have easy bus service free to seniors that travels between towns year-round. This allows folks to travel in bad weather without fear of driving. Some nice assisted living arrangement that might be somewhat segregated from the community but easy enough to get to town and experience intergenerational activities.
Sincere appreciation for all members enrolled in this comprehensive program.
Someone to check on me each day to see that I am OK. I don't need to have a long conversation to take up a volunteer's time.
Thank you for all your hard work with this big endeavor! We appreciate all you do! Bless you.
Thank you for doing this. The meeting gave me hope that I might be able to stay in Bethel.
Thanks
Thanks to all the members of the committee who have done all this hard work moving this forward.
The Bethel community is moving in the right direction but I worry that it will not be able to sustain its' momentum. There are a large number of 80 year-old plus folks with few coming up behind them to take over their lead. A facility with a public pool would be a tremendous asset to the community. Some things are cost prohibitive for many people.
The need exists for reliable, dependable, capable domestic help on a regular basis. Also, home health, transportation, home maintenance (chores requiring strength), and access to resources for information.
There needs to be something done in Gilead. I am not sure how to word this but I am doing my best. We need to have more posted state slow down signs on Route 2. They speed and pass like it is a race strip. It is very dangerous for me and I have grandchildren and am in a wheelchair. There are no wheelchair trails for me to access if I want to go for a stroll. There are so many things that I have to say but I do not want to step on toes or make people mad for voicing my ideas. More traffic stops, speed

traps, stores, crime watch is needed. Gilead is a forgotten town. You blink, you missed it.

This certainly is a good beginning! Thank you.

Transportation and medical expenses are most important to me

Trying to make ends meet. Affordable health care. So far we have not found any. We are going to an insurance meeting next week for help.

Very complete. Go for it!

Water and sewage costs should also be paid by state establishments as well

We are lucky to live in an area that provides beauty and outdoor activities. Being a tourist area, we have many activities on weekends. But I do think we need a community center for socialization, supervised exercise programs, etc. that would provide daytime activities for the elderly. Please add: We need a more comprehensive grocery store!

We need a place to talk about drugs and how to get out of it? For the people need help too.

We plan to stay in our own home as long as possible. We have no children or anyone to assist us, so, eventually we will no doubt end up in senior housing or a nursing home if available.

Well done

Well done folks!