

West Orange Survey Of Older Adults: A Summary of Findings

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About CREEHS:

The Center for Research and Evaluation on Education and Human Services (CREEHS) is an independent University-based research and evaluation center housed within the College of Education and Human Services at Montclair State University. CREEHS conducts objective multi-disciplinary and multi-method applied research and evaluation to enhance program planning and outcomes in education, health, and human services; provides high quality evaluation training and education; and advances evaluation Science by bridging the expertise of researchers and practitioners. The Center provides services for school districts, institutions of higher education, government agencies, community-based organizations, and foundations to help them meet accountability and program improvement needs.

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INTRODUCTION

Aging in place is defined as the ability to live in one's own home and community safely, independently and comfortably, regardless of age, income or ability level. Aging in place initiatives are programs created specifically to address obstacles that may impede an older person from being a vital productive member of their community.¹ As the population in the United States ages, aging in place initiatives have become a focus in many communities throughout the nation.²

More than 13,000 residents of West Orange, New Jersey, or approximately 29% of the township's population, are aged 55 years and older, as of 2010. The proportion of West Orange residents who are 55 years or older has increased nearly 10% between 2000 and 2010 and it is expected to continue to increase over the next few decades.^{3,4} As a result, there is a need to adapt services and physical environments in the community to support older adults.

With funding from the Partners for Health Foundation, the Township of West Orange partnered with the Center for Research and Evaluation on Education and Human Services at Montclair State University to conduct a survey to better understand the characteristics, assets, needs and future plans of West Orange residents aged 55 years and older.

This survey was distributed, both in paper and online, throughout West Orange in fall 2017. This report summarizes the data collected through the survey and offers recommendations to inform future efforts by the Township of West Orange to support residents aged 55 years and older. The report focuses on community services and resources, transportation, housing, health, communication, as well as overall feelings and perceptions about West Orange and aging. Each section offers information on the identified assets and needs of these areas, followed by recommendations based on these findings.

¹ Ball, MS. Aging in Place: A Toolkit for Local Governments. ARC and Community Housing Resource Center. Available at: <http://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/livable-communities/plan/planning/aging-in-place-a-toolkit-for-local-governments-aarp.pdf>.

² Farber, N. & Shinkle, D. (2011). Aging in Place: a State Survey of Livability Policies and Practices. National Conference of State Legislatures and AARP Public Policy Institute. Available at: <http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/ppi/liv-com/aging-in-place-2011-full.pdf>.

³ U.S. Bureau of the Census (2018). Census 2000 Summary File 1, Matrices P13 and PCT12.

⁴ U.S. Bureau of the Census (2018). Census 2010 Summary File 1, Matrices P13 and PCT12.

METHODOLOGY

In June 2017, the Township of West Orange commissioned the Center for Research and Evaluation on Education and Human Services (CREEHS) at Montclair State University (MSU) to conduct a survey of West Orange residents aged 55 years and older. The paper and online survey was administered to West Orange residents aged 55 years and older during August 2017 through October 2017.

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

CREEHS staff developed a survey protocol in collaboration with representatives from the Township of West Orange, including but not limited to staff from the West Orange Department of Health and Councilwoman Michelle Casalino. Survey questions addressed six dimensions of the West Orange community (Figure 1), asking respondents to indicate the availability and use of services, satisfaction with services and additional needs in each dimension. Questions were sourced from existing instruments such as the United States of Aging survey, the Community Assessment Survey for Older Adults, the AARP Survey of Community Residents and others. Where additional items were needed, the CREEHS team developed tailored questions to address the specific topics.

Figure 1. Community dimensions addressed by survey



To pilot the survey, the CREEHS team worked in collaboration with the Township of West Orange to bring together a small group (i.e., 5-10) of West Orange residents, aged 55 years and older, to take the survey and provide feedback on the instrument. The feedback was used to revise and/or delete questions to improve the readability of the survey.

The final survey consisted of 89 questions and took about 60 minutes to complete. The survey was made available in English and Spanish.

SURVEY RECRUITMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

The Township of West Orange administered the survey in paper and online, using a variety of recruitment methods. These included:

- posting news articles in local websites and media outlets (e.g., West Orange Chronicle, West Orange Department of Health website),
- including letters about the survey in municipal tax bills,
- sending emails with the online survey link to local listservs and
- posting community flyers around West Orange.

More targeted recruitment methods included presenting information about the survey, dropping off paper surveys, picking up paper surveys and/or providing computers for online survey completion at each of the following locations or agencies in West Orange.

- Four senior citizen apartment buildings
- Two senior citizen social groups
- West Orange Public Library
- West Orange Township Pool
- West Orange Recreation Department
- West Orange Health Center
- West Orange Department of Health and Welfare
- Various houses of worship
- West Orange Hispanic Foundation
- West Orange African American Organization

Moreover, to raise awareness about the survey, CREEHS staff collaborated with the Township of West Orange to conduct a training of survey ambassadors (i.e., volunteer community members). The training explained the logistics of survey distribution and information on the best ways to recruit

individuals to participate. The training was shared with staff from the Township of West Orange, which continued to train other community members to facilitate survey administration. For example, the Township of West Orange trained high school students on survey administration processes. Older adults in West Orange were invited to West Orange High School to complete the survey, and students were able to facilitate the process. All paper surveys were entered by the Township of West Orange staff and/or trained volunteers.⁵

SAMPLE

Estimates from the 2010 Census indicate that 13,200 adults (aged 55 years and older) live in West Orange. Allowing for a margin of error of approximately +/- 5%, CREEHS recommended surveying approximately 375 adults for this assessment. Overall, 813 individuals agreed to participate in the survey in paper or online. Of those, 753 were eligible, based on their age (i.e., 55 years and older) and place of residence (i.e., a resident of West Orange). The 753 eligible surveys represent approximately 6% of the West Orange population, aged 55 years and older. The margin of error for this survey is +/- 3.5%. Overall, survey respondents were an average of 70 years old and most frequently identified as white, female, with a graduate degree, and a household income of \$100,000 to \$149,999 per year.

ANALYSIS

CREEHS staff analyzed the quantitative and qualitative data collected through the survey as appropriate. Descriptive statistics (e.g., frequency analysis, cross-tabulation) were used to analyze and summarize closed-ended survey items, using SPSS statistical software. Open-ended responses were content analyzed for common themes and key contextual information, using N-Vivo qualitative analysis software.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

The assessment provided an opportunity for respondents to express their thoughts about the needs and assets of the Township of West Orange, from the perspective of a resident aged 55 years and older. These data provide information about the community dimensions that are working well and those that may need additional attention.

Key strengths of this assessment include the following:

⁵ To ensure accurate data collection and data entry, CREEHS developed and hosted a training with West Orange Department of Health (DoH) staff, as well as community members, who were invited to participate by the DoH.

- Sample size: The number of valid surveys completed (n=753) exceeded the goal of 375 surveys. Six percent of West Orange residents, aged 55 years and older, participated in the survey and provided their feedback about aging in West Orange.
- Survey instrument: The thorough nature of the survey provides information about a wide variety of community dimensions and topic areas. As an opportunity for residents to voice their opinions about West Orange, the survey addressed major aspects of life in West Orange. As a result, the data provide information that is likely to be relevant to various municipal government agencies and stakeholders.
- Township of West Orange staff: Staff at the Township of West Orange were committed to ensuring that residents had the opportunity to comment on the survey draft and were knowledgeable about the survey. They identified a variety of ways to recruit participants and leveraged resources to maximize community participation in the assessment.

This assessment also had limitations, which include the following:

- Study design: This assessment used a cohort study design and collected information from residents at one point in time. As a result, the ability to see change over time or to understand how preferences, use and satisfaction have evolved is limited. Further, findings are based only on data from surveys and do not include information from other sources, like interviews or focus groups. While surveys help to describe the breadth of experiences, they are limited in their ability to explain the depth and specific circumstances around such experiences.
- Survey instrument length: Although the thorough nature of the survey is a strength of the assessment, many respondents did not complete the survey in its entirety due to its length. In addition, it is possible that some eligible residents elected not to participate in the survey because of the time needed to complete it. As a result, the findings from the survey may be missing key information from individuals who have limited time.
- Survey instrument language: The survey was available to participants in English and Spanish. Data indicate, however, that other languages are also spoken in West Orange households (e.g., Italian, Greek). While the Township of West Orange leveraged the language department at West Orange High School to provide translation services for the survey, it is possible that the survey was not available to eligible residents in all languages needed.
- Representativeness of the sample: In comparison to Census data, the respondents that completed the survey:
 - Underrepresented those aged 55 to 59 years and aged 80 and older

- Underrepresented males
- Underrepresented residents who identify as black or African American, Asian or Hispanic
- Underrepresented residents with a high school degree or less education

As a result the specific opinions and experiences of these groups of residents may not be represented in the findings.

COMMUNITY SERVICES AND RESOURCES

West Orange residents aged 55 and older were asked about various clubs, activities and services offered in the community. Respondents indicated the frequency with which they participate in these and their satisfaction with them. They were also asked to indicate the extent to which a variety of issues are problematic for them. Finally, respondents were asked to indicate their overall satisfaction in this area (Figure 2).

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

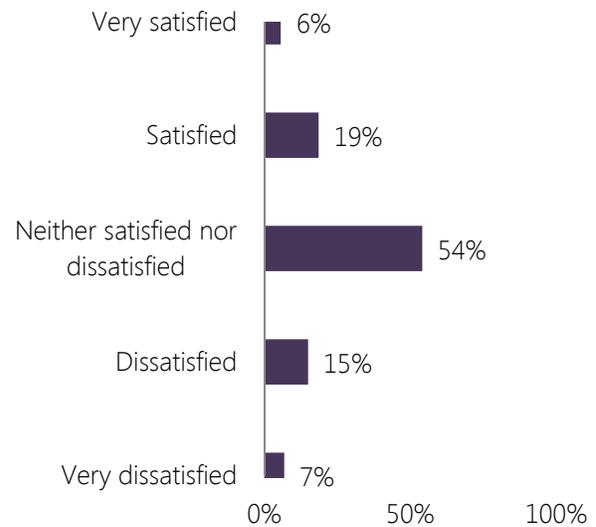
ASSETS

- Multitude of programs and services available, including the Library, Zoo/Ice Arena, Thomas Edison Museum
- Volunteer opportunities and meaningful/productive activities
- Willingness of residents to pay a small fee (i.e., \$5-\$10) for services

NEEDS

- Lack of awareness of available services and resources
- Issues around communication and promotion of services

Figure 2. Overall level of satisfaction with community services and resources (n=592)



RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on the survey data collected from West Orange residents aged 55 years and older. It is possible that programs and services addressing these recommendations already exist in West Orange and in these cases, these recommendations are intended to catalyze discussion and future action about how best to address the findings of this assessment.

1. Consider increasing or using alternative methods (e.g., bulletins, resource guide) for communicating services and activities to residents and for obtaining residents' opinions.

"I believe the Township offers many programs for the various ages of our residents. Keeping people informed of these programs presents a problem"
- Survey respondent
2. Consider scheduling and promoting more trips to the highest rated places (e.g. library, zoo/ice arena) to encourage resident participation and maximize community resources.
3. If there are funding limitations, consider charging small service fees to fund desired services or programs.
4. Consider creating more regular opportunities for older residents to share their opinions and views about how services and resources are promoted and implemented (e.g., hours, transportation).

TRANSPORTATION

Residents aged 55 and older were asked about the various modes of transportation used in West Orange. Respondents indicated the frequency with which they use various types of transportation and their satisfaction with them. Respondents also were asked about walkability and the best ways to get around town. Finally, respondents were asked about their overall satisfaction in this area (Figure 3).

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

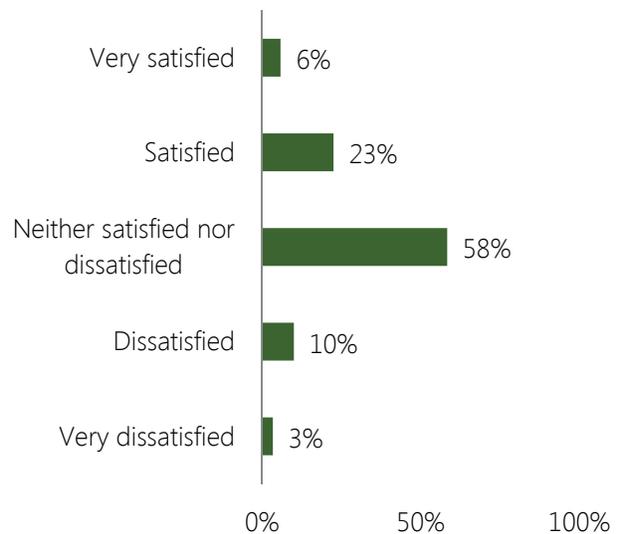
ASSETS

- Mobile and driving population
- Easy to get around West Orange

NEEDS

- Safety concerns, including quality of sidewalks and crossing at intersections
- Lack of walkable destinations
- Lack of parking in downtown West Orange
- Lack of knowledge of schedules for local public transportation options

Figure 3. Overall level of satisfaction with transportation (n=551)



RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on the survey data collected from West Orange residents aged 55 years and older. It is possible that programs and services addressing these recommendations already exist in West Orange and in these cases, these recommendations are intended to catalyze discussion and future action about how best to address the findings of this assessment.

1. Consider increasing the availability and expanding methods of distribution of schedules for public transportation services, such as the jitney and other senior transportation services.
2. Coordinate and lead opportunities for assessing and addressing the location of missing sidewalks and the condition of existing sidewalks.

“There are many streets with no sidewalks and many sidewalks are not well maintained and I have a fear of tripping and falling”
- Survey respondent
3. Explore options and implement additional safety measures for crossing at intersections (e.g., walkability audit, repainting lines, increased crossing time).
4. Consider where additional parking can be added, particularly in the downtown area, or alternative transportation to local places (e.g., shuttle buses from further parking lots).

HOUSING

Survey respondents were asked about the housing options in West Orange and their current living arrangements. Specifics regarding aging and living alone were asked as well. The survey also probed respondents about their planned future living arrangements. The extent to which various aspects of housing, such as taxes, are a problem were examined. Finally, respondents were asked about their overall satisfaction in this area (Figure 4).

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

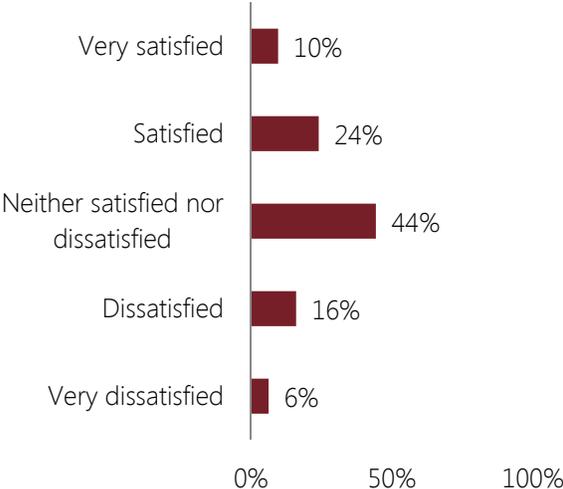
ASSETS

- Desire to stay in West Orange in their own homes
- Feeling safe and secure

NEEDS

- High taxes
- Limited options for affordable housing (e.g., condos, smaller homes, single level homes)
- Need for home improvement services, such as landscaping and snow removal

Figure 4. Overall level of satisfaction with housing (n=551)



RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on the survey data collected from West Orange residents aged 55 years and older. It is possible that programs and services addressing these recommendations already exist in West Orange and in these cases, these recommendations are intended to catalyze discussion and future action about how best to address the findings of this assessment.

- 1. Consider increasing the promotion of existing West Orange services for home improvement or home maintenance (e.g., snow removal, home improvement, landscaping) to ensure that residents who need these services know they exist and how to access them.

- 2. Explore opportunities available to offset the cost of taxes for senior residents. This may include home sharing programs for older adults, providing assistance to complete low-income tax credit applications or other efforts.

"As much as I love my house and neighborhood since I am retired the taxes are becoming too expensive for me to afford to stay here."

- *Survey respondent*

- 3. Research, plan and identify opportunities to increase the inventory of one-level apartments, condos or other smaller housing arrangements for older adults in West Orange.

HEALTH

West Orange residents aged 55 and older were asked about their physical and mental health, including food insecurity and activity level. They also responded to questions about their use and overall rating of various health services available in West Orange. The affordability and availability of health programs and services were surveyed as well. Finally, respondents were asked about their overall satisfaction in this area (Figure 5).

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

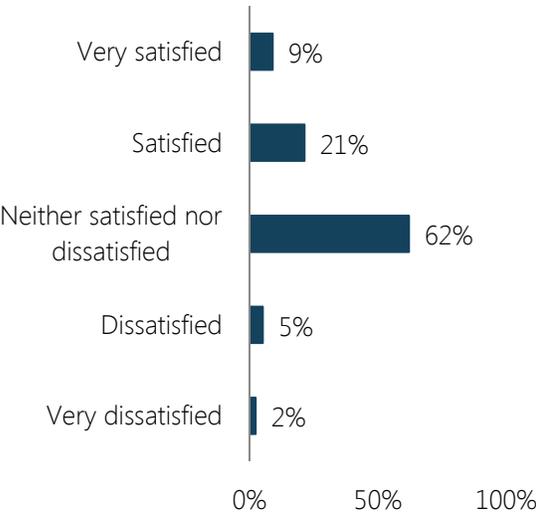
ASSETS

- Most perceive their health to be good compared to peers
- Physically active population (physically active 5+ days a week)
- Healthcare services in the community are widely available and well-maintained

NEEDS

- Lack of knowledge of health services available
- Portion of the population that is food insecure
- Limited options for transportation to doctors' appointments

Figure 5. Overall level of satisfaction with health services (n=501)



RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on the survey data collected from West Orange residents aged 55 years and older. It is possible that programs and services addressing these recommendations already exist in West Orange and in these cases, these recommendations are intended to catalyze discussion and future action about how best to address the findings of this assessment.

1. Consider offering more or promoting existing services and programs related to physical activity to meet the health-related interests of residents.
2. Consider increasing the number of health-related educational courses offered to meet the health-related interests of residents.
3. Develop and distribute a directory of West Orange's health-related services for residents through various modalities (e.g. paper, electronic).
4. Collaborate with community partners, such as food pantries, houses of worship and others, to identify and provide meals to older adults who may be experiencing food insecurity.
5. Identify and implement transportation strategies that residents may use to travel to healthcare-related appointments. This may include taxi voucher programs, subsidized Uber rides, developing a transportation hotline for residents to call and others.

"Transportation to get to health services, especially in neighboring towns, is problem"

- *Survey respondent*

COMMUNICATION

Survey respondents were asked about communication and how informed they are about programs and activities in West Orange. They were asked about their preferences for receiving communication, including language and media type. Respondents were asked about their overall satisfaction in this area (Figure 6).

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

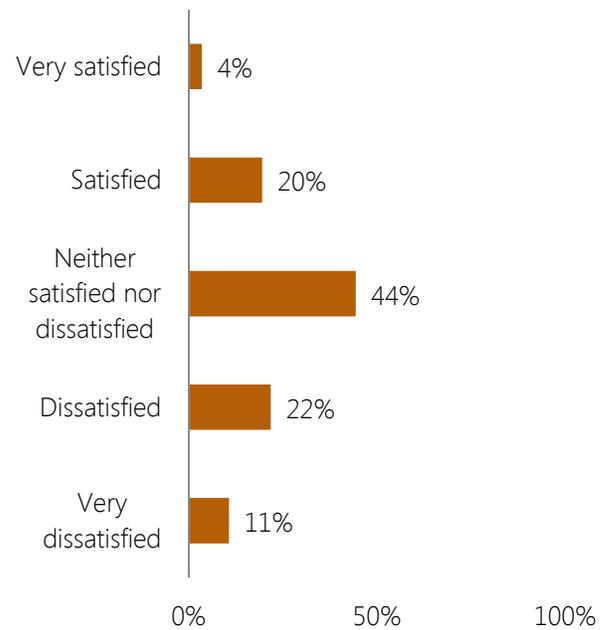
ASSETS

- Residents use and have access to computers
- Communication through word of mouth
- The newspaper, radio, and TV facilitate communication of programs and services
- Positive perception of communication that is available

NEEDS

- Residents consider themselves uninformed
- Centralization of resource and program information

Figure 6. Overall level of satisfaction with communication (n=513)



RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on the survey data collected from West Orange residents aged 55 years and older. It is possible that programs and services addressing these recommendations already exist in West Orange and in these cases, these recommendations are intended to catalyze discussion and future action about how best to address the findings of this assessment.

1. Ensure websites and advertisements of West Orange services and programs are mobile friendly to ensure that older adults obtaining information on their mobile phones can easily access these sources.
"I have very little knowledge of any programs for people over 55. If I do learn of something I learn about it too late. I would like a comprehensive resource guide for seniors in WO - then I could be proactive"
- Survey respondent
2. Develop and distribute a centralized resource guide that includes services, programs and activities available to West Orange residents aged 55 years and older. Consider including contact information for additional details.
3. Develop and distribute a community calendar for those ages 55 and older. Consider making it available both online and in print through the newspaper and in key community locations (e.g., library, zoo).
4. Expand the use of existing communication assets, such as the West Orange Chronicle, television stations, radio stations and other methods.
5. Research and identify individuals and agencies that service as informational hubs in West Orange. It may be useful to target communication of events and services to these individuals or agencies so that they can continue to share the information through word of mouth.

OVERALL

Survey respondents were asked about how they feel about West Orange as a place to live, their preparedness to age in West Orange, as well as their overall ratings of the programs and activities available.

PREPARING TO AGE IN WEST ORANGE

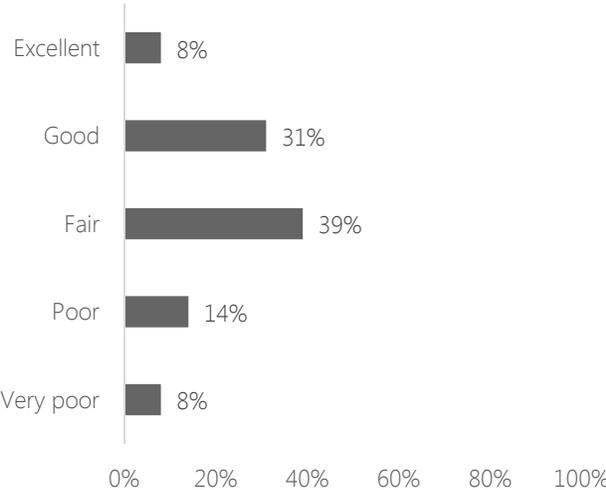
Respondents of the survey were asked to rate West Orange as a place to live as people grow older. Nearly two-fifths (39%) of respondents rated it as a “good” or “excellent” place to live as they grow older (Figure 7).

More than a third (43%) of respondents indicated they feel “well prepared” (30%) or “very well prepared” (13%) to be an older adult in West Orange (18% indicated “unprepared” or “very unprepared”).

Respondents reported various ways in which they have begun to prepare for aging over the next 10-15 years. The most frequently reported measures taken included the following.

- Saving for retirement (65%)
- Making a living will (62%)
- Learning about changes to healthcare (48%)
- Registering for a saving retirement plan (26%)
- Learning about programs available in West Orange (16%).

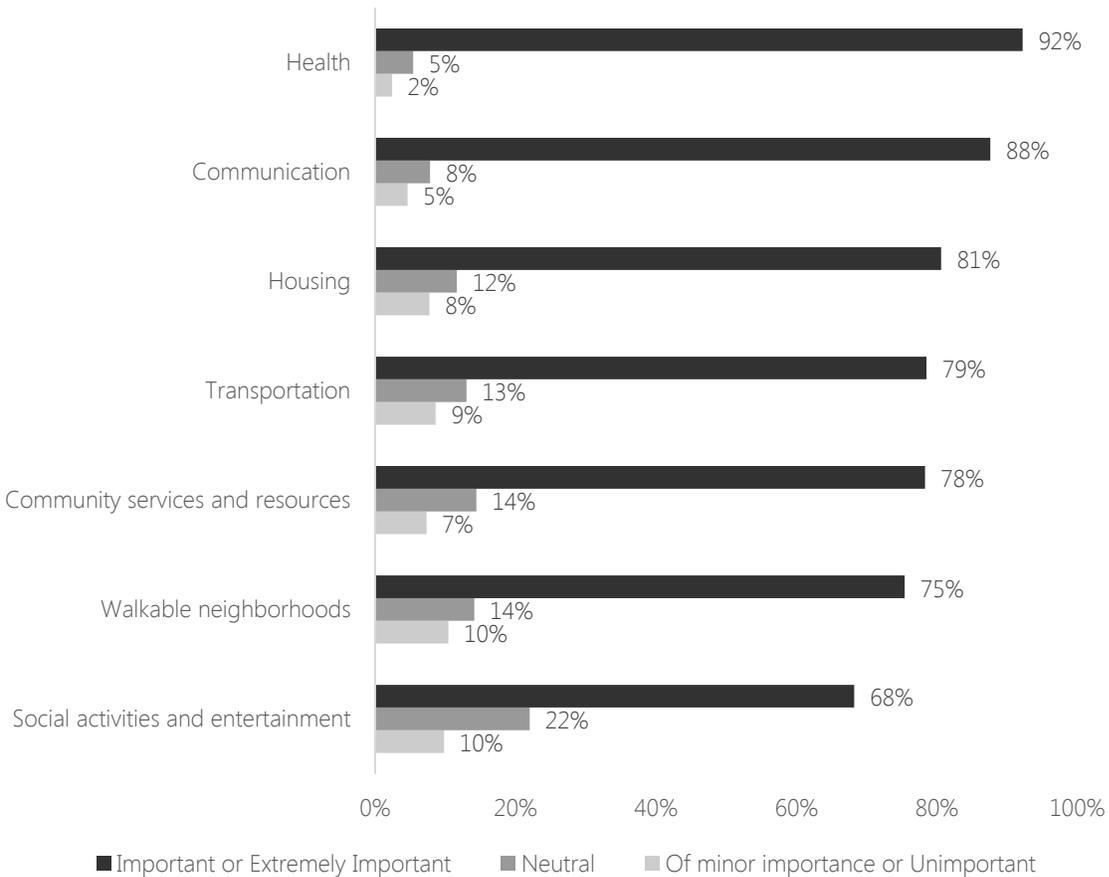
Figure 7. Rating of West Orange as a place to grow older (n=525)



IMPORTANCE OF HEALTH

After completing the majority of the survey, respondents were asked to reflect on and rate the importance of various aspects of the community, such as housing and walkable neighborhoods. The community dimension most frequently rated as “important” or “extremely important” was health (92%) (Figure 8). Other top-rated areas include communication (88%), housing (81%) and transportation (79%).

Figure 8. Ratings of importance of items over the next 10-15 years



CONCLUSION

The purpose of this survey was to better understand the characteristics, assets, needs and future plans of West Orange residents aged 55 years and older. The information included in this report is based on the survey data collected by during the period of August 2017 through October 2017 and made available to CREEHS. The findings describe respondents' experiences, perceptions and preferences related to community services and resources, transportation, housing, health, communication, as well as aging in West Orange. The data inform the strengths and areas for improvement in West Orange so that it may continue to serve the needs of older adults aging in the municipality.

Although there are limitations to the assessment's design, the data suggest the following overall findings.

- **Respondents are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied in the community dimensions assessed.** Findings suggest that no one community dimension was rated worse or better than another. There are strengths and areas for improvement in each of these dimensions.
- **Health, communication and housing are the community dimensions that are most important to respondents.** As a result, efforts may be prioritized to address the needs and enhance the assets in these dimensions. For example, respondents are interested in participating in educational seminars. Given the importance on health, these seminars may be related to health- or housing- related topics. As an option, consider surveying residents regarding possible health or nutrition related topics to best inform the subjects of the classes.
- **Respondents wish to remain living in West Orange because of its geographic location and services available, however difficulty affording the taxes may prevent them staying in West Orange.** Findings indicate that West Orange is a place where older adults would like to continue to live. This may be due, in part, to its geographic location which is close in proximity to services, resources and attractions. In particular, respondents enjoy Turtleback Zoo, the local library and the Codey Ice Arena. Despite these preferences, respondents overwhelmingly indicated that West Orange is an expensive place to live in and that will make it difficult to remain in West Orange as they age. High taxes and the availability of affordable housing are cited as primary concerns about remaining in West Orange through retirement.
- **Although there are existing services and resources for West Orange residents aged 55 years and older as well as information available about them, there is a lack of awareness of the services in the community.** Across the community dimensions assessed, a majority of respondents were unaware of the services and resources that exist in the community. Generally, these respondents were dissatisfied with the communication and information

available about such services. They were interested in participating in the services, but are uninformed about what is available to them and would like better ways of obtaining this information. Some respondents, however, were aware of services and were generally satisfied with the services and the information available about them. Data suggest that there are portions of the population who actively seek out information and are able to find the information they desire, while others who could benefit are not as active and miss out on these potential opportunities.

- **Different age groups of older West Orange residents may have different service and resource preferences, suggesting that programming could be tailored to those age groups.** This survey collected data from older adults aged 55 through 99, a range of 44 years. The programs and services preferred and/or needed by younger age groups in this range (i.e., 55-64, 65-74) may be different than those by older age groups (e.g., 85-94, 95 and older). For example, respondents in older age groups mentioned less frequently that they were able to handle their home maintenance needs than younger age groups. As a result, home maintenance services may be more appropriate and interesting to older age groups and thus, programming could be tailored to them.
- **Additional, more tailored communication and information sharing about West Orange resources is needed.** Findings indicate that information is available about existing programs and services in West Orange, however only those that actively seek it out are able to access it. To improve the reach of this information, existing community assets may be leveraged. For example, most respondents learn about services and other information through word of mouth. Identifying persons or tools (e.g., The West Orange Chronicle) that are well connected with other residents ages 55 and older and engaging them to be ambassadors of West Orange services and resources could facilitate communication. Further, as some younger age groups may not identify themselves as “seniors”, it may be important to tailor the messaging about such services to ensure they have broad appeal for all who are eligible.
- **Additional opportunities are needed to ensure that older adults in West Orange are able to share their opinions and perceptions.** Many respondents indicated that they do not feel their voice is being heard in West Orange. They also indicated that they are unaware of what is available for them in West Orange, despite the existence of such services and information. To address this gap, additional or expanded opportunities are needed to enable residents to voice their specific desires in the promotion and development of programming and activities.

Overall, there are areas to be targeted and areas that are already strong in the community. Considering the recommendations throughout the report may help to continue to grow and improve the capacity of the Township of West Orange to serve those aged 55 years and older.