

Meeting the transportation needs of older adults

Hamilton Council on Aging and partners working on plan for an Age Friendly Community

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The Hamilton Council on Aging, along with its partners the City of Hamilton and the Seniors Advisory Committee is now preparing the second plan for an Age Friendly Community

Hamilton's Age Friendly Plan has seven goal areas and this opinion editorial will discuss what we heard from Hamiltonians with respect to Goal 2 - Getting Around Hamilton. This opinion editorial will discuss what we heard during our consultations. We are also informed by several publications, *A Statistical Profile of Older Adults in Hamilton, March 2019* prepared by the Epidemiology and Evaluation, Public Health Hamilton, *Aging in the City of Hamilton: a summary report on the Age-Friendliness of Hamilton using the CLSA Data*, prepared by Hamilton Council on Aging and a further consultation to assess the potential impact of COVID-19.

Under the first Hamilton's Plan for an Age Friendly City (2014-2019) several initiatives were facilitated through the plan: with the collaboration of HSR, workshops on taking the bus were given and trip planning in several languages were prepared; cycling workshops geared to older adults were offered; a comprehensive guide to Hamilton's Outdoor Recreation Trails *Let's take a Walk* was published; and, in collaboration with Public Health, Public Works and McMaster University, many older adults attended workshops on Pedestrian Safety to learn about the new crossover signals, gage their walking speed against the signal-light time, refresh their knowledge of the rules of the road and give feed-back to problem areas they encountered as a pedestrian and as a driver. With regard to the feed-back, the suggestions were passed on to Public Works, who have already made some changes and will make more as road work in specific areas is undertaken.

As we began to review feedback to develop the 2020-2025 plan, we recognize that the fact that most older adults living in Hamilton continue to use the car to get around must inform our recommendations for Goal 2. As a result, collaboration with Hamilton's Vision Zero Committee and McMaster University will be crucial in order to implement actions that will contribute to the ability of older adults to continue to drive safely. Actions around driving skills, updating knowledge of rules of the road and drivers' aids as well as strategies for when driving is no longer possible will be developed.

The consultation process also highlighted concerns about the HSR, including affordability, availability, crowding, difficulties in exiting from the rear door, driver etiquette, for example. We will, therefore, direct our recommendations to the City's '(Re)envision the HSR' initiative.

The COVID-19 pandemic has added another dimension to the conversation about public transportation. Up until now, public transportation has been organized around the principle of 'mass' transportation, that is transporting the maximum number of people possible. COVID-19 already has impacted this concept and will perhaps continue to do so in the future, not only because of current physical distancing rules but also because of a change in travel patterns due to a decrease in the number of people commuting to and from work, school, large events, etc. The organizing principle might shift away from 'mass' toward 'community' travel, where people will need to be transported to and from more local destinations. This change could have a positive impact on meeting the transportation needs of all Hamiltonians, by enabling the HSR to redeploy its service to meet these new realities across underserved portions of the city.

The HSR network serves Hamilton's urban transit boundary, which does not include some portions of the city's outer suburbs and does not include any service to rural communities. While most older adults living in rural communities drive, their increasing age may eventually remove this transportation option. It's crucial for the City to explore innovative strategies to support this inevitable challenge. Increasing access to affordable on-demand rural transportation services and connecting into more transit park-and-ride locations on the extremities of the suburbs may be among the possible solutions.

Snow clearing is another topic that was consistently flagged during the consultation. Older adults' demand for improved snow clearing of sidewalks and intersections must be heard and we will, therefore, propose to put this on the agenda of the Vision Zero's plan to ensure pedestrian safety.

Finally, in all future expansion of Hamilton, whether it be within or outside the urban boundary, we will be making recommendations to ensure that the transportation needs of older adults be incorporated into the planning process.

Jeanne Mayo is a member of the Hamilton Age Friendly Collaborative Governance Committee and the City of Hamilton's Seniors Advisory Committee. For more information on the Hamilton Council on Aging and to join our membership or make a donation please see www.coahamilton.ca