



The Township of Black River-Matheson

Seniors Needs Assessment



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Table Of Contents

Introduction	1
Township of Black River-Matheson.....	2
Demographics.....	3
Age-Friendly Trend Information	6
Project Overview.....	17
Methodology.....	19
Needs Assessment Findings.....	21
Domain 1: Outdoor Spaces and Buildings.....	22
Domain 2: Transportation	24
Domain 3: Housing	26
Domain 4: Community and Health Care	27
Domain 5: Social Participation	28
Domain 6: Information and Communication	29
Domain 7: Civic Participation and Employment.....	30
Domain 8: Respect and Social Inclusion	31
Strategic Linkages to Other Documents	33
Conclusions - Summary	40
Next Steps.....	42

Charts

Chart 1: Township of Black River-Matheson Map	2
Chart 2: Black River-Matheson Population Growth Trends	3
Chart 3: Population Age Demographics for Black River-Matheson	4

Tables

Table 1: Total Population and Changes from 2016 (Statistics Canada 2021).....	3
Table 2: Black River-Matheson Provincial Comparisons (Statistics Canada 2016)	5
Table 3: Provider Survey Response Tally	20
Table 4: Township Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities	37
Table 5: Key Areas Identified for Improvement by WHO 8 Dimensions.....	41

1.0 Introduction

An “age-friendly community” is a community that allows people of all ages to participate in activities that keep the community healthy and encourage economic stability. It is a place where older people can easily stay connected with others and remain independent. An age-friendly community also looks out for those who need support to age successfully.

Across Canada and in Ontario, some communities, organizations, and individuals have already taken steps to make their environments age friendly. These kinds of initiatives benefit the entire community. Simple supports ultimately lead to more dollars spent in the local economy, more individuals contributing to the community, and fewer health issues caused by high-risk environments for seniors. Creating and maintaining an age-friendly environment is essential for the success of an entire community. We are all aging, and it's necessary to recognize the factors that improve the lives of older populations today and for generations to come.

In the Fall of 2021, The Township of Black River-Matheson proposal was awarded \$60,000 from the Ministry of Seniors and Accessibility to conduct a Seniors Community Needs Assessment and develop an Action Plan aimed at improving the environment to better promote well-being, independence and active living for older adults and persons with disabilities. Following receipt of the funding the Township engaged in a procurement process and selected D & A Consultants, to facilitate the project, community engagement, planning process and report preparation. The project was overseen by the Township's Senior Advisory Committee with support from Township staff.

The age-friendly project consisted of 2 main elements: a needs assessment and an action plan. The needs assessment was initiated in the Fall of 2021 through a community engagement process designed to acquire information on senior's community needs, wants, and desires. The community engagement process, resulted in this report, a comprehensive Needs Assessment aligned with the World Health Organization's Age-Friendly Communities framework that considers 8 domains of quality community life that overlap and intersect to affect an individual's personal well-being, their independence and active living. The 8 domains through which community needs are assessed included: Outdoor Spaces and City Buildings, Transportation, Housing, Communication, and Information, Social/Recreational and Cultural Participation, Civic Participation and Volunteering, Community Support and Health Services, Respect and Social Inclusion.



This report describes the Age-Friendly Needs Assessment (Phase I of the Project) outlining the methodology, providing background/trend information, the findings from the needs assessment, as well as offering strategies for improvement going forward, to be addressed in the Action Plan (Phase II of the Project – by March 2022). To help ensure success, the findings and priorities identified for action in this report are intricately linked to processes and plans already underway in the Township, such as the Township Strategic Plan and Accessibility Assessment Report

It is important to note that this age-friendly initiative (Needs Assessment and Action Plan) is a living process, intended to serve as a strategic blueprint for ongoing community development and relationship building through collaborative planning by the Township, service providers and its citizens.

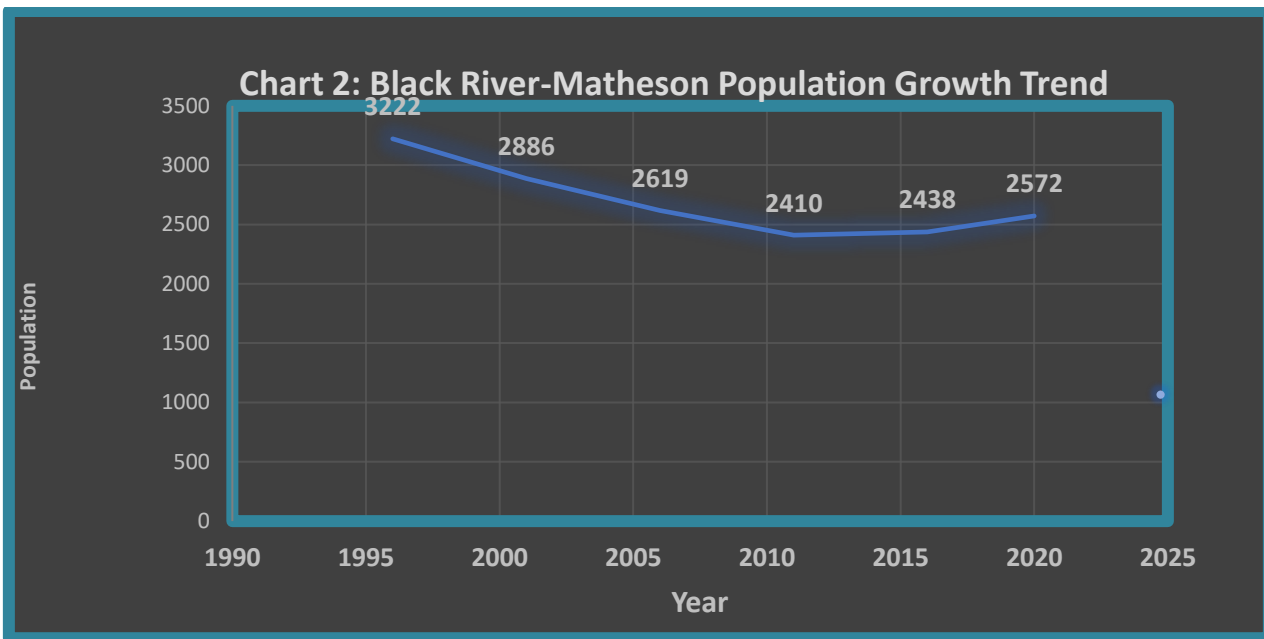
Township of Black River-Matheson

Resulting from a formal amalgamation in 1971, the Township of Black River-Matheson consists of five (5) main towns: Shillington, Matheson, Ramore, Holtyre and Val Gagne. Matheson is the largest town and lies approximately 56 kilometers northwest of Kirkland Lake, 65 kilometers east of Timmins and 320 kilometers north of North Bay. Matheson, the administrative center of the Township of Black River-Matheson, is centrally located at the junction of Trans-Canada Highway #11 and Highway #101, and almost equidistant from the cities of Timmins, Kirkland Lake, the Town of Cochrane and the Quebec border please see Chart One: Map. In February 2022, Statistics Canada released the first round of 2020 Census Data in themes with the first theme showing Canada's growing population and where they live. The total population for Black River-Matheson is now 2,572 a 5.5% increase or 134 people. The population density per sq km is 53.9. Chart 1 shows a map of the Township of Black River-Matheson.



Chart 2 illustrates changes in the Township's population between 1996 to 2020. While Black River-Matheson grew by 5.5% according to Statistic's Canada Population Growth and where people live profile for 2020; unfortunately, as shown in Table one other comparator communities experienced negative growth patterns except for Temagami.

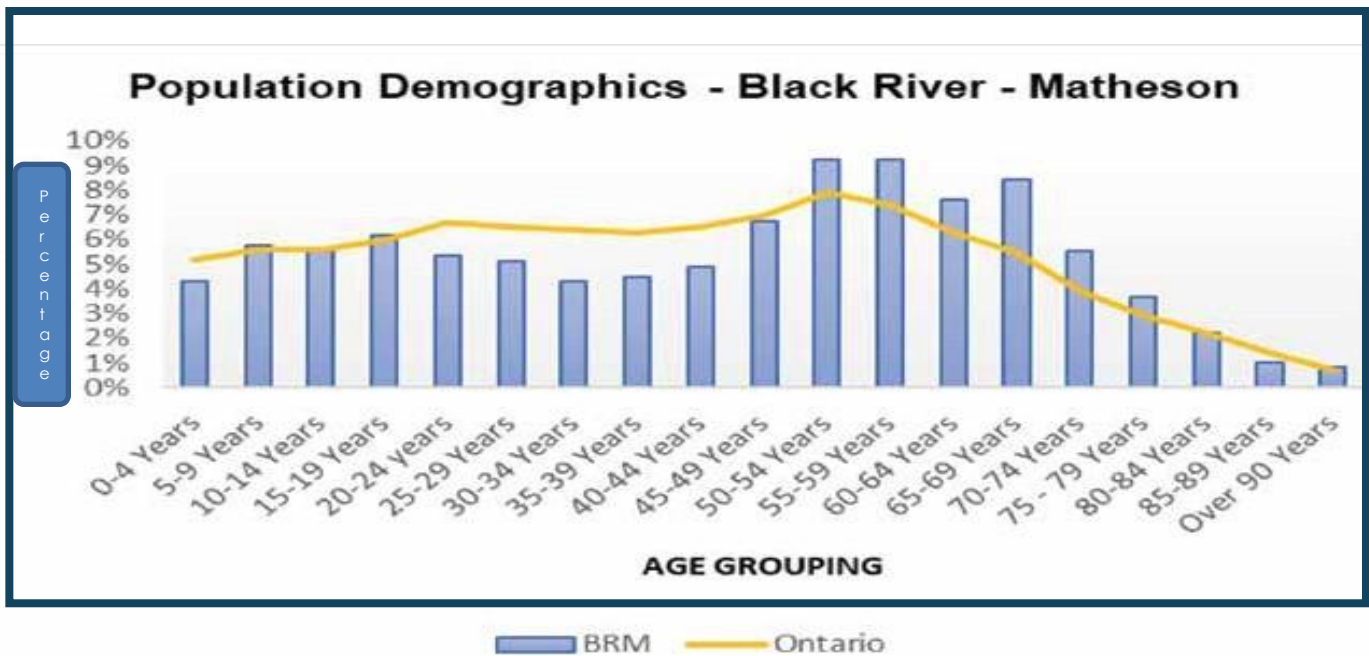
In terms of older adults, the Municipality of Temagami and Town of Englehart followed by the Black River-Matheson (BRM) have the greatest proportion of individuals aged 65+. The Town of Englehart, followed by Iroquois Falls have the "oldest" aged 85



While Black River-Matheson grew by 5.5% according to Statistic's Canada Population Growth and where people live profile for 2020; unfortunately, as shown in Table one other comparator communities experienced negative growth patterns except for Temagami. In terms of older adults, the Municipality of Temagami and Town of Englehart followed by the Township of Black River-Matheson (BRM) have the greatest proportion of individuals aged 65+. The Town of Englehart, followed by Iroquois Falls have the "oldest" aged 85+.

Indicator	Chapleau Township	Englehart Town	Iroquois Falls Town	Temagami Municipality	Black River-Matheson Township	Ontario
2020 Total Population	1,942	1,442	4,418	862	2,572	14,223,942
% Change from 2016	-1.1%	-2.5%	-2.6%	7.5%	5.5%	5.8%
2016 % of the population aged 65+	19.8%	26.4%	23.3%	29.2%	21.8%	16.7%
85+	2.8%	4.1%	3.6%	1.2%	2.1%	2.2%
Total # of private dwellings 2020	973	720	2,153	928	1,403	-

Chart three shows the population demographics for BRM compared to Ontario. There appears to be a deficit in the proportion of the 'Working age' population compared to Ontario. Concurrently, the percentage of older adults (age 50+) is significantly higher than Ontario.



Like many communities in Northern Ontario, BRM has experienced a fluctuating population, they are now faced with an aging population with limited opportunities to replace a retiring workforce. As a result, the Township is facing a range of challenges having an impact on municipal service delivery and local quality of life. The role and influence of municipalities and citizen expectations for quality service, value-for-the-taxpayers dollar and effective governance are on the rise. There is a commitment by the Township to the delivery of quality public services, facilities, and infrastructure.

The Township aims for service excellence while offering a variety of amenities, facilities, programs, and services that residents, visitors, businesses, and customers need and expect. Municipal Council and staff are committed to building a focused, responsive, resource-conscious, and results-oriented organization. The Council and Administration has experienced several changes and transitions in the past year, including but not limited to senior staff turnover, increasingly limited resources, evolving regulatory standards, increased need for accountability and increased public expectations for efficient service delivery.

Table two below, provides a snapshot of critical indicators comparing the Township of Black River-Matheson to the Province. It is important to note that the indicator stating that greater than 30% spent on shelter costs is an indicator of living in poverty and being at risk of homelessness.

Table 2: Black River-Matheson & Ontario Comparison (2016 statistics Canada)

Indicator	BRM	Ontario
Proportion of the pop as a % that is age 65 and older	21.8	16.7
Proportion of the pop that is aged 85 and older	2.1	1.6
Median age	48.3	42.4
Language spoken most often at home – English	73.7	77
French		
Non-official language	18.6	2.1
Aboriginal	5.8	14.8
	0.2	0.1
Third generation	86.6	45.4
Self identified Aboriginal	7.0	2.8
Self identified Metis	5.4	0.9
Total visible minorities	2.3	29.3
Percentage that owns their house	82.5	69.7
Rents	17.0	30.2
Spends greater than 30% of income on shelter costs	17.1	27.7
Average rent per month	\$658	\$1,109
No high school certificate	29.6	17.5
Post secondary degree	43.3	54.2
Average household size	2.3	2.6
Married or common in law	64.1	59.3
Divorced	5.1	4.7
Widowed	7.0	8.8
Total lone parent family	12.1	17.1
Couples without children	61.5	45.5
Prevalence of low-income after-tax age 65+ only	17.6%	12.0

Seniors (those 65 years of age and over) are the fastest growing age group in Canada. In 2016, there were 5,935,635 seniors, who represented 16.9% of the total population in Canada and this percentage is expected to increase to 24% by 2036. As shown the proportion of seniors residing in the Township of Black River-Matheson compared to Ontario is statistically significant.

The proportion of self-identified Aboriginals, Francophone and Metis is also significantly higher than the province and is likely an undercount. People of First Nation's descent has been shown by Canadian research to age faster than Caucasians and have higher rates of chronic diseases such as diabetes, COPD, and cardiovascular events. These two factors alone strongly suggest the need for adopting an age- friendly planning approach going forward.

Age-Friendly Trend Information

The aging/age-friendly community trend information in this section was gathered from best practice research and planning reports across Canada, Ontario, and findings at the Regional Level. The age-friendly trends and considerations for further study identified below will be considered in preparing both the local Needs Assessment and determining Priorities for Action. Note that 4 key age-friendly World Health Organization domains emphasized in this section were found to be of particular significance for the Township, as determined by the local needs assessment. They included: Housing, Transportation, Outdoor Spaces and Buildings, Community Supports and Health Services.

Housing Trends:

Canada's almost six million seniors represent a complex and dynamic cohort, with diverse living arrangements and housing needs. Within this context, it is generally understood that most seniors desire to age in community. However, as individuals age their needs and capabilities can change and they may experience challenges in finding suitable housing to accommodate their changing needs. These challenges may include difficulty in finding affordable housing; ability to afford necessary adaptive devices and aids; limited access, or barriers to obtaining, mobility / hearing aids; and/or potential gaps in availability of appropriate supportive services such as home care.

- The 2016 Census reported that 93.2% of seniors lived in private dwellings (house, apartment, or moveable dwelling) while 6.8% lived in collective dwellings, such as residences for senior citizens, long-term care (LTC) facilities or health care related facilities.
- Approximately 25% of Canadian households are led by people over the age of 65 years, 75% of these households are owned and 25% are rent accommodation. The largest proportion of these senior-led households are couples without children; the second largest group is single women. In 2016, 2.2 million Canadians lived in multigenerational housing, 349,350 of whom were aged 65 and over.
- Housing moves by seniors can be characterized as either "lifestyle," "planned," or "crisis," each of which is typically underpinned by a number of "push" (for example, death of a spouse) or "pull" factors (for example a desire to be closer to children and grandchildren). Seniors are less likely to move than the general population. In 2016 only 5.5% of seniors 65 to 74 years old and 4.7% of those 75 years and older had moved compared to 13.0 % of the general population in the previous year. Seniors who are widows and those who are divorced or separated are more likely to move. Seniors who are renting their homes are twice as likely to move compared to seniors who are homeowners (14% versus 7% respectively).
- According to the 2016 census, almost a quarter of seniors lived below standards (24.9%) regardless of their housing arrangement. Individually or in combination, affordability issues were most common (19.4%) followed by adequacy issues (4.6%) and then suitability issues (2.6%). Core housing need (42.8%) e.g., inadequate, or unsuitable, and affordability (39.7%) issues were common in households of seniors living alone.

- Housing developments often lack basic consideration of good environmental design (steps, ramps, railing, lighting, safety features, etc.). Seniors' housing built between the 1960s and 1990s is often unable to accommodate newer independence technologies such as motorized scooters and bulky electric wheelchairs that need to be plugged in.

As seniors age, they are more likely to face disability, find that their disability creates difficulties for them, and that they need help. Without informal and formal support (for example, home care), older people with disabilities are among those who are most likely to want or need to find alternative forms of housing. Home renovations and adaptations can be implemented to improve safety and accessibility. Modifications can enhance seniors' overall functioning and well-being. Home modifications can help seniors age at home and may prevent the need for them to move. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the physical and social environments are key determinants of whether people can remain healthy, independent, and autonomous as they age. As such, in an Age-Friendly Community (AFC), the physical and social aspects of a community are designed to improve the health and well-being of older adults. Across Canada, the for-profit and the not-for-profit sectors, often in conjunction with local governments and incentives from other levels of government, have developed a variety of housing options that try to capture the meaning of home and the spirit of AFCs. The options include

- Mainstream Housing,
- Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs),
- Independent Living and Active Lifestyle Accommodation (inclusive of home share, life lease, cooperatives, and flex housing),
- Assisted Living / Supportive Housing Accommodation, and
- Seniors Residences and Long-Term Care (LTC) accommodations.

Beyond building new housing, home modifications such as 'Granny Flats' are another alternative for addressing some integrated housing needs. Research, however, has shown that two barriers to this option are lack of knowledge among seniors to carry out home modifications and the lack of resources to carry them out. Where governments in Canada and other jurisdictions have created funding mechanisms for home assessments and modifications.

Housing considerations include:

- There is a need to increase the supply of housing for seniors overall, with options that consider the range of health needs and income status of seniors
- Senior women are more likely to live alone and have low incomes, and therefore are more likely to live in core housing need (living below standards)
- Strategies should continue to be sought to incentivize builders, planners, and purchasers to incorporate features of universal design for future adaptability and accessibility into new builds and renovations

- Strategies should continue to encourage and promote production of more diverse and affordable housing options; Canadian and Ontario needs demonstrates that no one housing option is preferable to seniors and all the options have positive benefits in sustaining the well-being of seniors



- The well-being of seniors can be improved through all levels of government encouraging and promoting inclusion of age-friendly principles into all future building and space design policy and planning. Overall, to implement Age-Friendly Communities, there needs to be adaptations and transformation among home design, neighborhood design, city planning, transportation, and health and home-care services

Housing considerations for further study (all levels of government):

1. Mixed-use developments with housing located near services and amenities to reduce some of the accessibility and transportation barriers that currently exist
2. Allow construction of smaller units such as accessory dwelling units for those wishing to down-size, reduce housing costs or house a live-in caregiver
3. Develop housing suitable for intergenerational living
4. Retrofitting of existing homes to improve accessibility
5. Construction of affordable rental units especially in suburban settings; and
6. Coordinate housing adaptations and community supportive services delivery to increase availability of supportive living options as a viable alternative to LTC

Overall, addressing the integrated housing needs of seniors and persons with disabilities will require adaptations and transformation with respect to home design, neighborhood design, cityplanning, transportation, and health and home-care services, in consultation with seniors and stakeholders.

Transportation Trends:



- Population aging is regarded as one of the most significant demographic developments of the past century. In countries such as Canada, older persons represent the fastest growing segment of the population. In Canada, the population aged 65 or over projected to reach 21.4 percent by 2026 (Statistics Canada).
- Furthermore, the process of population aging is occurring at a much faster rate in rural and northern areas than the rest of Canada.
- Approximately **20 percent of Canadian seniors live in rural parts of the country** and this population will require special attention as community needs change.
- Transportation is one of the greatest concerns for the growing senior population both in urban and more so in rural areas. For most older adults, the availability of suitable forms of transportation is crucial for their continued participation in economic, social, and recreational activities. The provision of effective transportation contributes to an older person's social integration by facilitating social interaction, community participation and access to goods, services and medical care that promote independence.
- Research has illustrated that there is **a close association between the lack of transportation and low life satisfaction, isolation, loneliness, and self-reported poor health**. In rural areas in particular, personal mobility is dependent on adequate transportation options and is an essential component of well-being for the aging population.
- Canadian research has found that a rural senior's ability to access distant services and activities may have a direct relationship to the ability to remain independent in the community and in many cases, driving an automobile allows older adults to remain independent in rural settings. However, the absolute reliance on private cars is a disadvantage because when an aging individual can no longer drive there tends to be limited transportation alternatives.

Increasingly, seniors in rural areas have become dependent on informal support networks to satisfy their mobility needs. The biggest problem is that they must rely on other people for transportation. This lack of transportation alternatives puts rural seniors at greater risk of isolation from their friends, local community activities and health and social services.

Transportation considerations include:

- **Driving Problems** - you need to have quick reflexes, good vision, and agility. Most of these traits have deteriorated in older adults. This makes the elderly less adept in traffic. The biggest issues are the inability to read words on signs, the lights from other vehicles, and the brightness of some road signs.
- **Distance to Public Transportation** - when older adults lose the ability to drive, they need to resort to public transportation. But this also can be an issue for the elderly because they often live far away from public transportation systems or there is no public transportation.
- **Inadequate Ingress** – a high entry step is a primary problem for most seniors when they try to board either a bus or train.
- **Timing** - this can be a problem for the elderly who are slow walkers. Older adults face obstacles when they find themselves at a pedestrian crossing and the green light quickly changes. This can put them in danger. *No lights in Matheson, but still an issue if it takes them a while to cross the road.
- **Scheduling** - timing is everything, and for the elderly, it can be a hindrance. Most older adults need public transportation at a time when it is not available. Because of their state, most seniors avoid rush hour. But that is precisely when most public transportation is available. Service is reduced when rush hour passes, and that is when the elderly want to do their chores.
- **Burden to Others** - with time, most elderly adults become too dependent on others for transportation. But many of them do not want to be a burden to their close ones. Because of that, their lives become harder as they lose one way of getting transported.
- **Conflicting Family Priorities** - with age, older adults have less need to use transportation than they had in the past. But when medical issues arise, they once again, need a constant means of transport. But at the same time, their close family has increased its members, and they have needs of their own and often cannot dedicate enough time and energy to their elderly loved ones.
- **Geography** - for the elderly who are no longer drivers, even a small hill can become a mountain. If they do not have someone to help them, seniors who live outside urban centers can have their well-being endangered by the inability to get transportation to a hospital or to simply leave their home for other needs.

Transportation considerations for further study (all levels of government):

1. The development of a rural transportation network should be considered that will provide a strategic framework to address the next steps and long-term solutions for transportation for rural seniors
2. Mobility solutions must address the unique needs of each locality
3. Transportation solutions must consider the degree of geographic isolation and the distinction between local mobility needs and long-distance transport requirements
4. Programming developed to provide awareness and support for rural seniors to give up driving and adapt to transportation alternatives
5. Increased recognition of the contribution of informal caregivers in providing transportation to rural seniors through tax credits
6. The standardization of the rate structure for transportation programs regionally and throughout the province to ensure equitable access for all rural seniors
7. The identification of the need for alternative solutions for long-distance transportation that is primarily required for medical purposes
8. The consideration of the use of different vehicle types to address the unsustainability of some aspects of the programs such as low ridership
9. The identification of additional funding sources such as corporate sponsors to address the prohibitive costs of universally accessible vehicles
10. The greater coordination and sharing of resources and services amongst all transportation programs as part of a coordinated system to address the transportation disadvantages experienced by rural seniors



Overall, addressing the transportation needs of senior and persons with disabilities will require the development of a greater understanding of the mobility issues for seniors in northern and remote areas and the establishment of a strategy to address the high degree of mobility disadvantage.

It is important to remember that many older adults live active lives, are safe drivers and can use public transit. There is no universally accepted age at which people are no longer safe drivers, even though chronic conditions and disability, which occur more

frequently in old age, certainly impact that skill.

Canada is a highly mobile culture, valuing the independence to go where you want and when

you want to go. It's no wonder, then, that the impact of having to "give up the keys" is a major, often negative, life event for many

older adults. But the impact can be lessened considerably if alternatives to driving are readily available and accessible.



Outdoor Spaces and Buildings Trends:

The physical environment is an important determinant of physical and mental health for everyone. Creating supportive environments, including age-friendly outdoor spaces, and building design, can enhance physical well-being and quality of life, accommodate individuality and independence, foster social interaction, and enable people to conduct their daily activities.

- In Canada and Ontario, seniors and caregivers have been involved in numerous studies identifying important aspects of outdoor spaces and buildings. Older adults and service providers in rural and remote communities expressed that "walkable" sidewalks, pathways and trails are particularly important not only because they support safety and physical activity, but also because they enable older adults to get around and take care of their personal and social needs. Participants also identified the importance of having amenities within proximity of each other. They identified several barriers, including a lack of sidewalks (or continuous sidewalks) in some communities. Even in communities where sidewalks are common, participants were concerned with the general state of disrepair and lack of maintenance for both sidewalks and trails.
- In addition to the importance of walking for such practical purposes as running errands, walking as a form of physical activity has become increasingly common for older persons. Ensuring that paths, trails, and walking routes are supported with sufficient washrooms and rest areas (especially benches) makes these areas more usable by seniors.



- Seasonal conditions vary and clearly have an impact on the “walkability” of communities. Quick and responsive snow-cleaning is appreciated by seniors, although snow clearing can sometimes lead to other problems. For example, snowplow tend to heap snow along the roadsides which can make it difficult for older persons to open car doors blocked by snowbanks. Similarly, sidewalks or streets that are slippery or have potholes are seen as hazards that make walking unsafe for older adults. Buildings with few steps, push-button doors and wheelchair ramps are important for accessibility by all seniors. Aging buildings, however, are often cited as having accessibility problems, older church buildings, for example, sometimes have washrooms in the basement, creating a problem for seniors with mobility challenges. Inaccessible washrooms or toilet stalls, stairs and heavy doors are challenging for older persons.

Outdoor Spaces and Buildings Age-Friendly considerations

- Walkable, well-maintained sidewalks, trails/pathway
- Pavements free of obstructions, non-slip, and wide enough for wheelchairs, walkers
- Cycling paths separate from pavements
- Good accessibility to and within public buildings (e.g., few stairs, wheelchair ramps that are not too steep, accessible washrooms)
- Along footpaths, accessible washrooms (e.g., wide push-button doors, rails), water filling stations, and clean rest areas, including benches that are an appropriate height
- Adjustments and adaptations that help seniors feel safe and secure in the community
- Provision of services within walking distance of where many seniors live
- Ensuring easy access for Older Adults to Township Facilities. Easy, comfortable access and a welcoming atmosphere to parks and facilities is of importance to many older adults, and those who have a physical disability. Designated free parking for older adults close to all facilities would make access easier, during wet, winter days and during the evening hours



Outdoor Spaces and Buildings considerations for further study (all levels of government):

1. Provide intergenerational outdoor activities to foster socialization between younger and older members of the community, and to aid those with mobility problems
2. Set up indoor walking clubs for periods of poor weather conditions

3. Post signage indicating the location of public restrooms
4. Provide good lighting, police patrols and community education throughout neighborhoods and on trails

Community Support and Health Services Trends:

Today, older Canadians are living longer and leading healthier lives with fewer disabilities than the generations before them. At the same time, the majority of seniors have at least one chronic disease or condition. As previously stated, by 2036, seniors will account for one in four Canadians with almost 75% of seniors living in urban areas, while the remaining 25% residing in rural and remote areas. Our health care system primarily focuses on cure rather than health promotion and disease prevention. Redirecting attention to the latter is required to enable older people maintain optimal health and quality of life. It will also help to manage health system pressures. The evidence is clear, older adults can live longer, healthier lives by staying socially connected, increasing their levels of physical activity, eating in a healthy way, taking steps to minimize their risks for falls and refraining from smoking.

- Research has shown that there are environmental, systemic, and social barriers to adopting healthy behaviours. Some relate to inequities because of gender, culture, ability, income, geography, ageism and living situations. These barriers and inequities need to be and are being addressed now. Through a combination of political will, public support and personal effort, healthy aging with dignity and vitality is within reach of all Canadian
- Cities, towns and villages, communities of all sizes are striving to meet the needs of their residents, including older adults. These communities recognize that seniors, and the community, benefit when healthy aging and “age-friendly” features become one of their trademarks. Healthy aging is a lifelong process of optimizing opportunities for improving and preserving all aspects of health, promoting quality of life, and enhancing successful life-course transitions. Health promotion and disease prevention strategies help seniors age well. Moreover, promoting healthy aging is part of a life-course approach aimed at reducing inequalities and supporting vulnerable people to improve well-being at all ages. Many of the policies and actions that promote an age-friendly community usually benefit both older and younger citizens at the same time.
- As the population ages, it makes more sense to create physical and social environments that support all citizens to be active and productive members of the community. For older adults, it may make the difference between their social isolation or their continued contributions to family, friends, neighbors, and the economy well into old age.



Across Ontario, there is a need to plan for how to organize a health and social care system for older adults as the population continues to age resulting in more people living with chronic conditions and requiring both healthcare and community supports. The current care system provides selected programs and services to support older adults to lead healthy and independent lives in their own homes. However, the programs and services that do exist may lack important programmatic supports, be limited in scope and be difficult to access.

Moreover, a variety of gaps exist in the health system for older adults including in delivery arrangements (e.g., lack of supports for self-management), financial arrangements (e.g., out-of-pocket payment that can deter the use of additional home care or community supports) and governance arrangements (e.g., lack of mechanisms to support the engagement of older adults and their families in the planning and delivery of services).

Community Support and Health Services Age-Friendly considerations include:

- Supporting older adults and their families in ways that promote healthy aging
- Coordinating and integrating healthcare services that are built around the needs of older adults.
- Designing age-friendly environments specifically to encourage physical activity intended to improve health and lower health care expenditures
- Re-orienting health and social services to better promote healthy aging through enhanced efforts in health promotion and disease prevention and control
- Developing a core group of senior ambassadors for healthy aging. There are many seniors who are actively engaged in healthy aging initiatives and seen as leaders in their communities. Recognizing, formalizing, and supporting a team of such “ambassadors” at the provincial and local level could be an effective way to increase awareness and support for healthy aging.



Community Support & Health Services Considerations for further study (all levels of government):

1. Developing neighborhoods that are walkable
2. Improving access to health care and social services
3. Addressing preventable conditions such as falls / depression
4. Reducing isolation and improving safety and social supports
5. Using home visits to reduce admissions to healthcare institutions
6. Providing end-of-life care in the home
7. Providing self-management supports
8. Providing information to clients and their families at lower reading levels
9. Using telehealth to reduce unnecessary hospital visits and service use
10. Providing specialist outreach to improve access to services and outcomes
11. Providing flexible and responsive respite care for caregivers
12. Using comprehensive geriatric assessments to improve health outcomes
13. Providing customized rehabilitation and disease management to prevent admissions to long-term care facilities and readmissions to hospital

Implementation of these strategies requires coordination and consensus building between multiple sectors and levels of government, as well as having providers and organizations modify existing roles and/or expand their typical scope of practice and activities.



Project Overview

In June 2021, the Township of Black River-Matheson was notified by the Ontario Ministry of Seniors and Accessibility, that their proposal has been awarded funds to conduct a 'Seniors Community Needs Assessment' and develop an 'Action Plan' for improvements. A main outcome of this project is to help seniors and people with disabilities stay safe, active, and socially connected, within their communities, especially during COVID-19. In providing this funding, the Ministry's focus is on small urban-rural communities, to identify and address the needs of diverse populations of older adults, seniors, or persons with disabilities (including but not limited to, indigenous, immigrant, and Francophone population groups). This project is directly aligned with the Ministry's "Advancing Accessibility in Ontario" framework which aims to make the province more inclusive and accessible by focusing on 4 key areas:

1. Breaking down barriers in the built environment
2. Government leading by example
3. Increasing participation in the economy for seniors and people with disabilities
4. Improving understanding and awareness about inclusiveness and accessibility

For this project, to assess age-friendly community need, the World Health Organization's (WHO) matrix of 8 Domains of quality community life that overlap and intersect to affect an individual's personal well-being, their independence and active living was utilized. The 8 domains through which community needs are assessed include:

1. Outdoor Spaces and City Buildings
2. Transportation
3. Housing
4. Communication and Information
5. Social, Recreational and Cultural Participation
6. Civic Participation and Volunteering
7. Community Support and Health Services
8. Respect and Social Inclusion

WHO Matrix of 8 Domains of Quality Community Life



8 DOMAINS



Methodology

This project made extensive use of the Ministry's 'Age Friendly Planning Tool Kit' checklists and assessment tools to organize and support the information gathering process. Community engagement and a review of background support documentation were the main methods used throughout the project to gather information.

Due to the pandemic, the Township of BRM and the Seniors Advisory Committee determined that the best and safest approach to information gathering was through surveys. Two surveys were developed, one for community members, the other for providers serving seniors.

These surveys were reviewed, revised, and approved by the Seniors Advisory Committee, who were instrumental in identifying places where seniors congregate e.g. The Cozy and Northern Lights Restaurants. An electronic copy/link to the community survey was placed on the Township's website and printed copies of the surveys were made available throughout key locations in the Community.



The Seniors Advisory Committee and Township staff identified organizations in the township serving mainly seniors, to be involved in the project. These organizations were contacted by the consultant and invited to participate in the initiative by completing a survey (an electronic link was provided as well as hard copies of the survey as needed). The provider survey sought information on services and supports and asked respondents to identify where the greatest system pressures and gaps existed.

To be comparable with the 'Community Survey,' the WHO age-friendly inclusive community domain format was replicated. Service providers were also asked to rate current system service effectiveness (excellent, good, poor), indicate priorities for new funding (if/ when available), and to identify/confirm the key obstacles or barriers to seniors and people with disabilities accessing service



Table 3: Provider Response to the Senior’s Needs Assessment

<p>Responses from the Community, Seniors, Older Adults, and People with Disabilities</p>	<p>N= 152</p>
<p><u>Provider Responses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Porcupine Health Unit - Alzheimer’s Society Timmons - Cochrane District Social Services - Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Ambulance 	<p>N= 4</p> <p>Provider Sample Size Comment</p> <p><i>*Providers views represent a <u>wide variety</u> of seniors, older adults, and persons with disabilities primarily the population they serve</i></p>
<p><i>Total Survey Responses Community & Providers N=156</i></p>	

- The final method of obtaining information was through a review of background support documentation.
- At the onset of the project relevant support documentation was identified by the Seniors Advisory Committee and Township staff.
- Best practice, successes, and trend information for age-friendly communities in Canada, Ontario and regionally were also summarized for 4 WHO domains of significance for Black River-Matheson:
 - o Housing,
 - o Transportation,
 - o Outdoor Spaces and Buildings, and
 - o Community Support and Health Services.
- Additional supporting documents included the Township's Strategic Plan and the Accessibility Assessment Report.
- This information was used to support and validate the findings of the senior’s community needs assessment, and to confirm the alignment of the priority areas of improvement for the Action Plan with other communities across Ontario and Canada.

The final method of obtaining information was through a review of background support documentation. At the onset of the project relevant support documentation was identified by the Seniors Advisory Committee and Township staff. Best practice, successes, and trend information for age-friendly communities in Canada, Ontario and regionally were also summarized for 4 WHO domains of significance for Black River-Matheson: Housing, Transportation, Outdoor Spaces and Buildings, and Community Support and Health Services. Additional supporting documents included the Township's Strategic Plan and the Accessibility Assessment Report.

Needs Assessment Findings

The needs assessment collected information on the needs of seniors, older adults, and persons with disabilities; what is working now (successful programs that promote independence, health, safety, and socialization), what should be expanded, what is missing (service gaps) and needed for improvement, and what the age-friendly community of the future should entail. The Main Objectives of the Needs Assessment were to:

- Initiate and complete a comprehensive needs assessment (targeting seniors, older adults, and persons with disabilities)
- Directly engage older adults, seniors, and persons with disabilities and the wide community/ stakeholders in the development of a needs assessment and subsequent action plan for improvements
- Ensure that the survey population is diverse and includes hard-to-serve isolated seniors, minority groups, and a variety of citizens - those with chronic conditions and in poor health, and those who are older but in good/excellent health and more active
- Increase awareness (and information gathering) amongst older adults, seniors and persons about this age-friendly initiative including methods of participation and project process and expected timelines and result(s)
- Advance local prioritized short, medium, and longer-term improvement goals (using the WHO 8 Domains)
- Assign accountabilities and advance performance targets and measurement metrics for each potential improvement tactic/strategy that is considered for implementation

Community Survey Respondents (N=152)

The majority of the community respondents 56% identified as a senior 65+, followed by 28% as older adults 55+. Of the total respondents 15% indicated that they were a person with a physical disability and a further 10% qualified their description saying they were a person with an invisible disability (e.g., deaf/ hearing loss, mental illness, brain injury)

Approximately 15% of the community sample said that they are a caregiver for a senior or person with disabilities (including their spouse, parents, and/or children).

Most respondents 82% acknowledged as being Caucasian, with only 1% identifying as speaking French.

Provider Survey Respondents (N = 4)

Approximately 55% of the providers overall service provision is to older adults / seniors and people living with disabilities in the Township of Black River-Matheson. Main client groups serviced includes well seniors living independently and to a lesser extent, seniors requiring some supports with activities of daily living

Survey Findings by WHO 8 Domains of Friendly Aging:

The survey studied the Townships current alignment with the World Health Organization 8 Domains of Age-Friendly Community Life. The findings below are the survey respondent (community and provider) results for the questions posed aligning with each domain area. To assist the reader in understanding the alignment of the question and the responses with the relevant domain, each section is prefaced with its WHO description of the Domain.

Domain 1: Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

The external environment has a major impact on the mobility, independence, and quality of life of older people as they go about their daily lives beyond the comfort of their homes. A clean community with well-maintained recreational areas, ample rest areas, well-developed and safe pedestrian and building infrastructure, and a secure environment provides is an ideal environment for seniors to age-in-place in.

A pleasant and clean environment with green spaces a place to grow old in, particularly in the face of increasing pollution levels. Cities facing high population growth and overcrowding are difficult places for elderly residents to navigate or feel a keen sense of belonging to. A community's cleanliness, noise levels, odors, and green spaces also affect the age-friendliness of the city. When communities develop a clean, green environment, and take age-friendly features into consideration for rural planning,

Age-friendly buildings, pavements and walkways, safe pedestrian crossings and adequate rest areas - Narrow, uneven, cracked, and congested pavements are potential hazards for older people, compounded by the weather when it rains or snows. Cars parked on pavements and cyclists also pose safety risks as pedestrians are forced to walk on the roads. Pedestrian crossing lights that change too quickly are another danger for older pedestrians, who may not go out in extreme cases.

**LOVE THE RED
BENCH. THERE
SHOULD BE
MORE**



- A lack of rest areas makes it even more difficult for seniors to get around when they tire. Public facilities and shops located faraway from where seniors live would deter seniors from using these facilities.
- A community will not be cohesive and integrated if residents feel unsafe. This, in turns, discourages older people from going about their daily lives independently and affects social integration between generations. Making residents feel safe also involves putting adequate measures in place against natural disasters.

Outdoor Spaces and Buildings – Survey Findings:

a) Community Survey:

- ***Eighty-eight percent of the respondents agreed that public spaces in the Township are clean and pleasant.***
 - Sixty percent said that the buildings are accessible for individuals with limited physical mobility, with 22% disagreeing with this.
 - Seventy percent agreed that green spaces and outdoor seating are sufficient in numbers and are well maintained and safe.
 - Fifty-seven percent said that sidewalks are in good condition and free of obstructions, with 28% disagreeing and offering suggestions for improvement.
 - Seventy-one percent felt that snow and ice clearing on sidewalks in a timely and efficient manner was adequate, with 18% of the respondent's offering ideas for improvement responses.
 - Forty-six percent agreed that there are enough parking spaces for people with disabilities,
 - 67% agreeing that there are enough pedestrian crossings.
 - 26% offered ideas for improvement in these areas.
 - Twenty-eight percent felt that there are enough lanes for scooters, wheelchairs, and bicycles in the Township.
 - Sixty-seven percent agreed that it is easy for older adults to get around by walking.

b) Provider Survey:

- Seventy-five percent of the respondents said that bike lanes are most needed.
- 50% identified a need for more rest places (benches), accessible washrooms, and sidewalks, with the remaining
- 25% desirous of more trails and walkways.

Domain 2: Transportation

Accessible and affordable public transport is key to ensuring a city's elderly population can age actively and remain engaged with their community, with access to health and social facilities. Driving conditions and parking facilities in a city should also keep older drivers in mind.

Accessible, affordable, and safe public transport - older people should ideally be able to navigate their city's transport system with ease. Apart from the affordability of transport services, residents indicated that safety of public transport services would affect their willingness to use them. Transport services should cater to people with a range of mobility needs. In addition, helpful drivers, and station staff sensitive to elderly needs would be able to better assist older commuters. Finally, information on safe, age-friendly, and affordable transport services must be made available to older people to facilitate their usage

Age-friendly driving conditions and parking facilities - Driving can be an essential transportation option for older people, particularly in suburban and more remote residential areas. Heavy traffic, poor road conditions, inadequate street lighting and poorly positioned signage are some barriers to city driving, particularly as older people may face vision difficulties. Maintaining confidence as driver's age is also important in ensuring a safe driving experience for all. Parking bays close to buildings and drop-off and pick-up bays are welcomed by seniors too.

Transportation - Survey Findings:

a) Community Survey:

- Forty-six % of the respondents indicated that they would use public transit services in the Township if available
- Forty-Nine % said that traffic signs are easy to read and understand.
- Fifty-three percent felt that taxi services in the Township are accessible and meeting needs.
- Only 31% thought that taxi services in the Township were affordable.
- Forty-five percent felt that the proportion of on-demand taxi services should be increased.
- Less than half the sample 42% said that the roads were well maintained in the Township.





- Thirty-five percent thought that there are good options for volunteers, and/or pooled driving resources.
- Forty-two percent of the respondents agreed that there is enough information about transportation services for seniors.

b) Provider Survey:

- Regarding needs, 75% of respondents said that special, accessible transit and volunteer drivers are the most needed services in the Township. There is “no” public transportation at all in the Township.
- Fifty percent cited a need for affordable taxis

Providers, Seniors, and People with Different Abilities all identified that the greatest need is for public transportation or affordable and accessible taxi services.

Domain 3: Housing

The housing conditions of older people are often linked to their quality of life and whether they are able to age independently and actively in their community. Appropriate housing design and its proximity to community and social services allow older residents to live comfortably and safely, while housing affordability gives them peace of mind.

Affordable, well-designed, and safe housing - The cost of housing and related utilities influences where older people live. High housing costs can discourage older people to move to more appropriate, age-friendly housing. A home with age-friendly features, such as elevators, wide passages to accommodate wheelchairs, etc., allows older residents to live comfortably. Conversely, a home layout impeding mobility, such as stairs and uneven floors, can be barriers for seniors. In these cases, the ability to modify one's home through affordable and accessible home alterations would ensure that seniors are able to continue living well in their current place of residence. It is also important that seniors feel safe and secure in their own homes.

A range of housing options with good connectivity to social services and the community - Locating social and health facilities close to seniors' homes is crucial in ensuring seniors have access to such services when they need it. Older people also wish to remain close to their family and community. Providing a range of housing options would cater to seniors' diverse needs.



Housing – Survey Findings:

a) Community Survey:

- 57% of the respondents felt that more local retirement home options are needed in the Township. With 59% also indicating a need for more long-term care homes (beds) in the community.
- Only 19% of the sample thought that the amount of subsidized (geared to income) accommodations in the Township was inadequate.
- 51% indicated that housing options for seniors and people with different abilities was also lacking.
- 47% reported that there are sufficient supports in the community to assist seniors to remain in their homes if desired (e.g., meal delivery, housekeeping, personal care).
- 46% of respondents felt that information on available housing options in the Township was lacking.

b) Provider Survey:

- The greatest housing needs identified (80%) were for age-friendly, affordable accessible housing and home maintenance. Next at 60% was a need of more affordable housing generally and more aging in place options including rent subsidies and/or geared to income housing for seniors and people living with disabilities.

Domain 4: Community and Health Care

Accessible and affordable community and health services are crucial in keeping seniors healthy, independent, and active. This involves an appropriate supply of aged care services conveniently located close to where older people live and trained health and social workers to provide these services.

Seniors have different health care needs and preferences. A range of services along the continuum of care, such as preventive care, geriatric clinics, hospitals, adult day centres, respite care, rehabilitation, residential nursing home care, home care and palliative care, would meet these diverse needs. These services should be easily accessible at locations convenient for seniors to reach. Residential care services, such as nursing homes, located within residential areas would allow older residents being cared to remain connected to their familiar surroundings. Education on the health system and available health services would raise awareness among seniors of the areas of care available to them. Health services should also be affordable or support available to cover the costs, to provide seniors with peace of mind that they will be able to receive care regardless of the ability to pay.



Community and Health Care – Survey Findings:

a) Community Survey:

- Sixty-four percent of the respondents thought that medical services in the Township were adequate.
- Ninety-two percent rated their mental health as good to excellent, with 8% saying fair, none of the respondents said their mental health was poor.
- Regarding the effect of Covid, 27% of the respondents reported being impacted a great deal or a lot by the pandemic, 53% were moderately or only a little affected, and 15% said it had no impact (5% declined to answer).
- Sixty-four percent of the sample agreed that healthcare services were available to them when needed, with 63% agreeing that health care was well coordinated.
- When asked to rate the overall services provided to older adults and people living with a disability in the Township, 80% felt that they were average to above average.



b) Provider Survey:

- Fifty percent of respondents stated the greatest need is for more primary care, and home care followed by a need for local palliative care and memory / dementia help navigating the support System

Domain 5: Social Participation

Participating in leisure, social, cultural, and spiritual activities in the community fosters seniors continued integration with society and helps them stay engaged and informed. Seniors' participation in such activities, however, is affected by access to transport and facilities, their awareness of such activities and their affordability.

A range of accessible and affordable activities - older people have a broad range of interests and needs. A variety of social activities would cater to such diverse interests. Such opportunities should also be accessible for people with disabilities and those who live further away. Activities taking place within hours suitable for older people and at convenient and accessible locations served by transport options would encourage greater participation as well. Activities must be affordable for older people to facilitate their participation. Hence, costs should be considered when planning the activities. Lastly, awareness on such activities must be raised among seniors to keep them informed of the opportunities available.

Encouraging participation and intergenerational integration - Seniors' participation in social activities helps to prevent social isolation. Seniors want to socialize and integrate with other age groups and cultures in their communities. Intergenerational activities are mutually enriching and fulfilling for all ages, with older people passing on knowledge, traditions, and experience while the young may help seniors with modern technology and practices.



Social Participation – Survey Findings:

a) Community Survey:

- Only 39% of the respondents agreed that there are sufficient recreational opportunities for seniors and people with different abilities in the Township.
- Sixty-five percent thought that activities and events in the Township were affordable.
- Fifty-five percent agreed that the Township has a good variety of activities and social clubs and groups available for older adults.
- Sixty-eight percent felt that the Township provided a good variety of shopping options for seniors. Moreover 82% said that service staff are courteous and helpful for seniors and people with disabilities.
- Just over half of the respondents 54% said that there is enough information about social, educational, and recreational activities for seniors in the Township.

b) Provider Survey:

- The majority (75%) of respondents indicated a need for affordable senior's recreational programs and social clubs, followed by arts and cultural activities, with 50% identifying education and intergenerational recreation and social programs for all ages.

Domain 6: Information and Communication

Staying connected with events, news and activities with timely, accessible, and practical information is a key part of active ageing, especially with the trend of information overload in urbanized cities. Technology can be tapped on to spread information quickly, but also plays a role in social exclusion. Cities must provide access to information to seniors in an accessible format, and bear in mind the wide range of needs and resources older people have.



Appropriate and age-friendly distribution of information - The media are instrumental in communicating information to the wider community. Older people tend to receive information through traditional print and broadcast media, and through direct personal contact such as telephone calls, service centres in community facilities and clinics, etc. Seniors' access to information must be kept affordable so that cost does not become a prohibitive factor. Governments and organizations must ensure that information on policies and issues affecting the elderly can reach them in a timely, effective, and accessible manner, through the communication channels seniors are familiar with. Making information accessible when older people experience vision and hearing loss is also crucial to ensure their full understanding.

The growing conversion of services and documentation to computer technology could be alien to seniors, increasing social exclusion. Older people may also be deterred from picking up computer skills due to the cost of computers and their unfamiliarity with technology.

Affordable access to computers for seniors in community facilities can play a significant role in building technological literacy in seniors, together with computer training adapted to seniors' needs and pace of learning.

Information and Communication – Survey Findings:

a) Community Survey:

- Fifty-seven percent of respondents indicated that they could be better informed about the services, programs and activities provided in the Township.

b) Provider Survey:

- Eighty percent of the providers identified a need for materials for the public to be produced in a larger print and to have the ability to provide a live-person option for telephone calls.



Domain 7: Civic Participation and Employment

Older people are an asset to the community, and they continue contributing to their communities after retirement. An age-friendly city and community provides ample opportunities for older people to do so, be it through voluntary or paid employment, and keeps them engaged in the political process.

Volunteerism and employment opportunities - older people can gain fulfilment from active involvement in voluntary activities or work, as it provides satisfaction and keeps them socially engaged. A wide range of volunteer and employment opportunities caters to seniors' diverse preferences, needs and skill sets, and awareness on the vacancies available connects seniors to these opportunities. Age-friendly urban and transport infrastructure removes any physical barriers seniors may face in accessing the volunteer or job opportunity. Continued training for seniors also helps them remain relevant and connected.

Entrepreneurial opportunities are another way to support seniors' participation in the workforce and ensure their sustained self-sufficiency.

There have been reports of age discrimination in the workplace. Building up employers' positive attitude towards retaining and recruiting older workers would help to ensure employment opportunities for seniors. The workplace can continue to be made more welcoming for seniors to put their experience and expertise to beneficial use.

Encouraging civic participation - older people's participation in the political process must be facilitated. Seniors may be involved through platforms to voice their concerns and views to government officials, or through participating in interest groups. They should also be involved in decision-making on issues that may impact them.



Civic Participation and Employment – Survey Findings

a) Community Survey:

- Eighty-seven percent of respondents indicated that seniors are welcomed at community events, activities and settings.
- Sixty-two percent felt that there are enough opportunities for volunteers to participate in the Township.
- Forty-five percent felt that there should be more employment opportunities for people with disabilities and seniors in the Township.

We need more recreational opportunities indoors especially on a regular basis. If we had our own bus to pick us up and drop us off afterwards that would be fantastic

- Fifty-six percent agreed that older adults and people with disabilities are recognized by the community for their past and present contributions.

b) **Provider Survey:**

- Accessible public venues and buildings for community participation were identified as the greatest need by 100% of the respondents.
- Eighty percent identified a need for employment and training opportunities for seniors and people living with a disability as well as additional support for volunteers (training, appreciation).

Domain 8: Respect and Social Inclusion

An inclusive society encourages older people to participate more in their city's social, civic, and economic life. This, in turn, promotes active ageing.

Respect for seniors - While respect for seniors is mostly healthy in many cities and communities, negative preconceptions of ageing still exist. There is a need to facilitate intergenerational interactions to dispel such notions. Education about ageing should also begin early to raise awareness on ageing and associated issues, so that people learn to appreciate their elderly.

Social and economic inclusion - Social engagement can contribute to seniors' esteem. Age-friendly initiatives to involve all seniors in activities where they have experience can keep them engaged with the community and help them feel valued in their community. Older people should always be consulted on decisions concerning them.



Respect and Social Inclusion – Survey Findings:

a) **Community Survey:**

- Seventy-six percent agreed that seniors and people with disabilities from diverse cultures are welcomed in the Township.
- Fifty-nine percent of respondents felt that the Township could be doing more to promote an all-inclusive and diverse community for seniors and people with disabilities.
- Fifty-two percent felt that decision-making bodies welcomed and valued input from seniors and people with different abilities in their planning processes.
- Eighty-one percent indicated that the Township is a safe and secure community.



b) Provider Survey:

- The greatest respect and social inclusion need for seniors and people living with disabilities identified by the providers (75%) was intergenerational recreation, social programs, and arts with hands on activities for people of all ages. 50% also indicated a need for cultural activities with people of all ages and intergenerational family activities. The remaining 25% identified the importance of spiritual activities, and community connectiveness.

Other Areas - Providers Survey:

- Improvements identified as most needed included: better access to primary and emergency care, more transportation options for people that do not own a vehicle, more senior programming (social and physical activities), personal support services and home care.
- Eighty percent of respondents report that there is no unnecessary duplication of services.
- The main obstacles and barriers identified that negatively impact seniors and people with disabilities trying to access services included: lack of affordable and accessible transportation, lack of awareness of services and where to go for help, and a long wait list for the service.
- New funding could be best allocated to health care, housing, and transportation.
- There was a 50% satisfaction indicated with the efforts of the Township to address the needs of its seniors and people living with disabilities.
- What has the Township done well so far – collaborated with partners (seniors advisory committee, applied for grants, social housing).



Strategic Linkages to Other Documents

The Township Seniors Community Needs Assessment and Action Plan are linked to current planning efforts and accessibility legislation. The Township is in the process of addressing the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) by considering the development, implementation and enforcement of accessibility standards concerning goods, services, accommodation, facilities, buildings, and employment. Furthermore, the Township has conducted an 'Accessibility Assessment' and advanced a 'Strategic Plan' that addresses the needs of the residents. Below is a brief summary of these key support documents.

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005:

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) received Royal Assent in June 2005. Under the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, this legislation is intended to benefit all Ontarians by establishing a goal of achieving accessibility for people with disabilities by the year 2025. The AODA applies to both the public and private sectors. It also applies to the legislative assembly. To achieve its goals, the AODA legislates the development, implementation and enforcement of accessibility standards concerning goods, services, accommodation, facilities, buildings, and employment. The AODA includes standards that set out the measures, policies, practices, and other steps needed to remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities. The standards address the full range of disabilities – including physical, sensory, hearing, mental health, developmental and learning. Both visible and invisible disabilities are included. Standards cover such areas as: accessible transportation, safe pedestrian routes into buildings, automatic doors at entrances, lower counter heights at cash registers, large-print menus, accessible washroom facilities, staff training in serving customers with learning disabilities, and adaptive technology in the workplace.

The Township has been actively attempting to address the intent and meet the goals of the AODA by vigorously developing, implementing, and enforcing accessibility standards. Examples include:

- Adopting Accessible Customer Service Standards Policy
- Providing Council, Township staff, Committee members and volunteers with Accessible Customer Service training; posting accessibility standards in the local paper as information for private businesses to follow; removing architectural and physical barriers at Township Hall to employees, residents, and visitors.
- Developing ongoing sensitivity training programs as part of new the Township's employee orientation.
- Improving signage for access to Township Hall, indicating the entrance area for persons with disabilities.
- Accessibility improvements made to the Township website as well as ensuring that the Township's hiring policy meets accessibility standards and requirements.

Accessibility Assessment for The Township of Black River – Matheson Facilities:

The Township engaged the services of a consultant to perform an accessibility assessment of public buildings, playgrounds, and the waterfront area. This review was conducted during the week of July 29th to August 2nd, 2019. Below are the main observations and recommendations of this report:

- In the Township, sidewalks are rare and parking areas and walkways lack accessibility, often being unpaved, in poor condition and lacking accessible parking spaces. This is a consistent issue at many facilities. Outdoor rinks and playgrounds need hard surface, low slope pathways to their entrances for improved access.
- Efforts have been made to improve access into most larger facilities such as the Community Halls by adding ramps where needed. Some compliance issues exist with these facilities.
- New construction, such as, the newly renovated public washroom facility at the Matheson Waterfront is fully compliant. The Vern Miller Memorial Community Centre has a power door entrance, however the door opening, and threshold still need adjustments.
- Common accessibility issues typically found in older buildings included narrow doorways, inaccessible door hardware, absence of an elevator in multilevel facilities and inaccessible service count
- A few exceptions, public washrooms throughout the Township were generally not compliant with current accessibility standards. In most instances signage indicating location of accessible parking, entrances and washrooms was absent. Visual alarm systems (alerting people to an emergency in a building) were absent in all facilities posing a safety risk.

Recommendations: for the purposes of developing an accessibility workplan

- The existing Town Hall was the most obvious example of non-compliance and needs to be fully accessible (top priority).
- Community Halls, Libraries and Museums should be given priority in terms of accessibility.
- The Matheson Waterfront pathways, eating area and boardwalk are a priority.
- The parking lots and building entrances need to be improved.
- Multi-story buildings need elevator access (or stair lifts).
- For outdoor ice rink shacks and playgrounds, there is no immediate pressure to make them accessible.



- Continued consultation on accessibility through the involvement of seniors and people with disabilities is needed to ensure success in the future.

A few exceptions, public washrooms throughout the Township were generally not compliant with current accessibility standards. In most instances signage indicating location of accessible parking, entrances and washrooms was absent.

- Visual alarm systems (alerting people to an emergency in a building) were absent in all facilities posing a safety risk.

Recommendations: for Developing an Accessibility Workplan

- The existing Town Hall was the most obvious example of non-compliance and needs to be fully accessible (top priority).
- Community Halls, Libraries and Museums should be given priority in terms of accessibility.
- The Matheson Waterfront pathways, eating area and boardwalk are a priority.
- The parking lots and building entrances need to be improved.
- Multi-story buildings need elevator access (or stair lifts).
- For outdoor ice rink shacks and playgrounds, there is no immediate pressure to make them accessible.
- Continued consultation on accessibility through the involvement of seniors and people with disabilities is needed to ensure success in the future.

Priority Seating



You must give up these seats for people using wheelchairs or other mobility devices.

AGDA, O. Reg. 191/11 | TTC By-Law No. 1

Please use the brake or secure your mobility device.

Township Community Economic Development Strategic Plan 2013:

The Township has developed a Community Economic Development Strategic Plan, with the goal of exploring opportunities to grow a stronger economy, bolster financial sustainability, create a more cohesive community, and drive an improved quality of life. The main purpose of this plan is to better enable Black River-Matheson and community leaders to begin building a more cohesive and cooperative community.

The **Vision** for the Township is **“through effective and active communication, in combination with positive community building efforts, Black River-Matheson will be a strong, vibrant and united community.”**

Residents will be engaged in making their community a better place to live and businesses will be provided with the opportunity and the environment to grow and thrive



Table 4: Township Strengths, Weaknesses and Opportunities

Strengths:	Weaknesses:	Opportunities:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - People who call BRM home - Located at the intersection of the trans-Canada Highway 11 and Highway 101 - Close proximity to Timmins and the Quebec border - Very active mining sector - Strong in agriculture - Great community facilities - Young families call BRM home - Skilled and non-skilled labour force - Affordable community to live in (low taxes) - Low housing costs - High speed internet and access - Hospital - Nursing home/long-term care facility - Elementary schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Black River-Matheson is not a cohesive community - Lack of community communication and engagement - Lack of community cooperation and action - Lack of housing - Limited social and recreational activities for youths and residents - No shovel-ready land or buildings for new or expanded business development - Over-all Black River-Matheson is beginning to look neglected - Very minimal marketing or external exposure for Black River-Matheson 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communicate with and engage the community of Black River-Matheson - Bridge historical community barriers and build cohesiveness - Provide services and activities for youth and residents - Plan for community infrastructure needs - Plan for the development of additional housing - Create new locations for business start-ups, relocations and expansions - Work to transform Black River-Matheson into a visually attractive community - Work with regional organizations to bring investment to Northern Ontario

Community Economic Development Strategic Plan 'Priority' Actions Include:

- Moving forward, it is imperative that the Township hire additional and appropriate staff to implement the Community Strategic Plan including a Chief Administrative Officer and Community Economic Development Officer.
- The Township needs to **develop an asset management plan and a long-term financial plan.**
- Bring the community together, by developing and implementing a comprehensive communications and community engagement strategy intended to begin to unite and create the community of Black River-Matheson.
- **Advance a 10-Year Housing Plan** undertake including a housing needs study to determine the current and projected demand for housing (including housing types)required in Black River-Matheson.
- To ensure Black River-Matheson remains a place that is attractive to youth and young families, partner with the Public and Separate School Boards (French and English) to build a Black River-Matheson youth engagement action plan.
- Undertake the **development of a business case to provide the rationale, and to determine the best and most strategic location, for the development of industrial/ employment land in Black River-Matheson.**
- Partner with local service clubs, and the BIA or Chamber of Commerce and the BRM business community **to develop a signature event or festival** aimed at celebrating the Township of Black River-Matheson.
- **Continue investing in Downtown Black River-Matheson** by undertaking and providingongoing funding for a Community Improvement Plan for downtown Black River- Matheson.
- Participate in a "**Communities in Bloom**" competition. The desired approach is to getthe community to work together to make Black River-Matheson a more beautiful community.
- **Create a marketing and branding plan** to be used in all economic development and investment attraction outreach.

Other relevant community and economic actions (but not a priority) included:

- - Begin re-programming of community facilities with activities aimed at all age segments.
- Undertaking a strategic review of the Black River-Matheson Official Plan to determine the most strategic locations for additional residential and industrial development.
- Working to develop a local farmers and crafters market in downtown.
- Partnering with College Boreal and Northern College to create a satellite campus in BRM that supports the home building and construction trades.
- Implementing an on-going business retention and expansion visitation program to encourage outreach to all businesses with Black River-Matheson.
- Creating a specific economic development marketing and branding plan to be used in all economic development and investment attraction outreach.
- Developing marketing tools to be used to reach target audiences.
- Presenting vital information and documents such as the quick facts, industrial area marketing materials, sector information sheets, etc. on the municipal website.
- Continuing to work with regional partners such to further promote and develop regional agriculture.
- Continuing to work with regional partners and local investors to explore all opportunities to activate the existing mineral processing facility.
- Partnering with local mining operations to undertake a local mining opportunities study to determine what support industries would be feasible in BRM.
- Preparing a Site Selector/Investment Proposal template.
- Continuing to update the Black River-Matheson industrial land inventory.



Conclusions – Summary

Overall, the research found that older adults and people with disabilities consider the Township of Black River-Matheson a positive place to live. The community was viewed as friendly, safe, secure, clean, and pleasant. Seniors and people with disabilities reported feeling welcome in the Township at community events, activities, and settings.

The Township and community partners are succeeding in their efforts to improve the environment for older adults and people with disabilities including: the provision and maintenance of green spaces and outdoor seating, increasing building accessibility for individuals with limited mobility, clearing snow and keeping sidewalks free of obstructions, and generally making it easy for older adults to get around walking in the Township, having traffic signage that is easy to read and understand, ensuring the provision of an array of health care services close to home, and ensuring that there are a good variety of affordable activities, shopping, and social opportunities available. Most people, engaged in this project, reported feeling respected and felt that their opinions were valued within the planning process.

The needs assessment process received wide-ranging feedback including the identification of key areas (or themes) that could be improved upon. This material is summarized in Table 5 below, across the 8 WHO dimensions for Age-Friendly/Inclusive Communities. It's important to note that the research highlighted certain WHO dimension as being of particular significance for the Township of Black River-Matheson including:

- Housing
- Transportation
- Outdoor Spaces and Buildings
- Community Support and Health Services

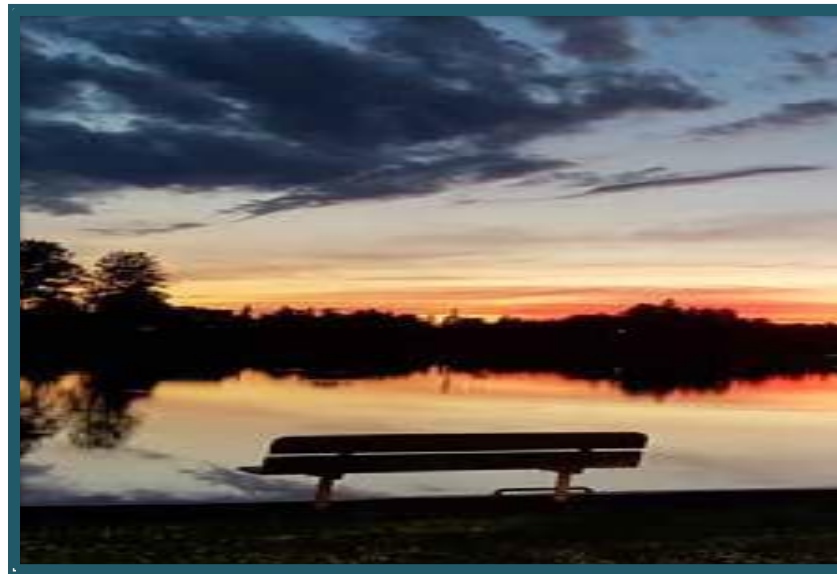


Table 5: Key Areas Identified for Improvement by WHO 8 Dimensions of Age-Friendly Communities

WHO Dimension	Key Areas Identified for Improvement
Housing	More long-term care homes in the community
	More affordable accessible housing options generally for seniors and people with disabilities
	Rent subsidies and geared to income housing
	More aging in place supports for seniors and people with disabilities (meal delivery, housekeeping, personal care)
	Information on housing options
Transportation	Better expanded public transit service/routes
	More affordable taxi service
	Need to increase the availability of on demand taxi services
	Road repairs/maintenance (infrastructure improvements)
	Transportation mapping on what is available for seniors and people with disabilities
Outdoor Spaces and Buildings	More seating/rest places/picnic tables
	Accessible washrooms
	More trails and walkways
	More accessible buildings
Community Support and Health Services	More home support care
	Local palliative care service
	Better access to memory – dementia supports
	More information on community services/supports and assistance navigating the support system
Social, Recreational and Cultural Participation	Arts and cultural programming/events
	Intergenerational social, education and recreation programs for all age
Communication and Information	Larger print materials in plain language
	Live in person telephone information contacts
Civic Participation and Volunteering	Need for more accessible public venues and buildings for increased community participation
	Additional support for volunteers (training and appreciation)
Respect and Social Inclusion	Intergenerational recreation and social programs
	Cultural activities with people of all ages
	Intergenerational family activities

Next Steps

The information gathered throughout the Seniors Advisory Community Needs Assessment (Phase I of Project) will be used to formulate an "Seniors Community Action Plan" (Phase II of the Project). The Action Plan will be structured using the 8 WHO domains, helping to ensure that a comprehensive set of strategies is development with continuity to the Age Friendly Community framework. The following next steps will set the stage for the Action Plan development:

- *Identify 'Priorities' that will be the focus of the action plan. Specific ranking criteria will be used to assist with the classification of the identified needs as either:*
 - Short-term (to be addressed immediately)
 - Medium-term (to be addressed within the next 12 months)
 - Longer-term need (to be addressed in the next 12 to 36 months)

The Seniors Advisory Committee and Town's Senior Staff will be engaged in the priority selection/classification exercise.

- From the short-term priorities identified, specific goal statements will be formulated. Then interventions, objectives and/or strategies will be identified to address the gaps of all of the 8 Age Friendly Community WHO domains. Throughout this process, the fit between proposed actions and community needs and capabilities will be assessed before moving forward.
- When the action priorities and strategies for improvement are identified and confirmed, the next step will be to designate leads from either the Seniors Advisory Committee, the Township, and/or other community key stakeholders or partners to lead the change process.
- Finally, timelines and expected results will be specified.

Once the above steps have been completed the Needs Assessment Report and 'Draft' Action Plan will be presented to the Seniors Advisory Committee and Township for consideration and support.



