

(4) *Is there a system in place to provide information regarding resources and health information to the town and community members?*

There is no plan or process for sharing health and public health related information.

Age Friendly

Conditions & Trend

(1) *The Age Friendly section of the Bowdoinham 2024 Comprehensive Plan is new. The rapid growth in our older population has significant impact on the community, including housing needs, access to support and health service, accessibility, risks of isolation, and civic and social engagement.*

Data on the characteristics of Bowdoinham’s older population came largely from the 2020 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates conducted by the US Census. Another major source of information about Bowdoinham’s older population was from findings of listening sessions held in the Summer of 2022 with major Town stakeholders whose work brings them into close contact with older adults, especially those at-risk.

Growth in Older Population

There has been a dramatic increase in the percent of Bowdoinham’s population 60 years and over in the past 20 years, increasing from 14% of the population to 29%. This trend will continue until the baby boom bubble recedes after 2040.

Percent Distribution of Older Population in Bowdoinham			
Age Cohort	2000	2010	2020
60 to 64 years	4%	7 %	9%
65 to 74 years	5%	9%	14%
75 to 84 years	4%	3%	5%
85 years & over	1%	1%	1%
Total 60 years & over	14%	20%	29%

Source: 2020 U.S. Census Bureau

Impact on Housing

Fifty-seven percent of households in Bowdoinham had one or more people 60 years or over residing in it. One in five households included a person 65 and over as the primary head. Often as people age, their homes are no longer safe due to stairs, inaccessible bathrooms, fire hazards or other barriers. Some homes may be too large and unaffordable to maintain. Although a high percent of Bowdoinham’s housing is owner occupied, rental arrangements often become the option of choice for older adults who plan to live off the proceeds from the sale of their homes. The simultaneous rise in the number of young families suggests the need for a flexible housing market which can meet the needs of all ages and abilities.

Impact on Support Services and Health Care Services

- Over 12% of Bowdoinham residents who are 65 years and over reported that living independently was a challenge. Slightly less than 4% of older residents are covered by Medicaid, most often due to a disability. Although almost all residents over 65 years are covered by Medicare. Medicare does not cover long term care services such as assisted living, residential care, or in-home support services.
- From July 2022 thru June 2023, program data from Rides in Neighbors' Cars showed that this volunteer-led ride program provided 440 rides logging 13,342 miles and 855 volunteer driver hours. Most commonly rides are given to medical appointments and grocery shopping. Although there is increased demand, driver recruitment is challenging. The State Medicaid program also covers transportation to medical appointments but residents report frequent unavailability of the service. New models to support the transportation demands of older residents are needed, such as possible scheduled services for areas of highest need such as grocery shopping.
- Data are not currently collected on the use of other volunteer-operated support services in Town including Medical Equipment Loan program, Twin Town Handy Brigade (formerly Handy Brigade), Digital Literacy Program, and Sand Bucket Brigade. Systems for tracking the use of these programs are needed to better assess trends and capacity.
- The 2022 listening sessions raised concerns about the fragmentation of services and the challenges experienced by residents in knowing how to navigate complex support and health service systems. The half-time position of the Town's Older Adults Services Coordinator has provided a critical contact point for residents to learn about available services and to get assistance in getting timely access. More work is needed to create a broader coalition of local stakeholders who can work together to assist older adults access support, health care, financial assistance, housing services. .
- There are no regular health care services in Town, including preventive and first aid. The Age Friendly Committee supports partnerships with surrounding Towns to determine the feasibility of satellite services in Bowdoinham or the development of a community paramedic program as part of our emergency medical service response program.

Accessibility of Buildings, Services, Meetings and Open Spaces

- All publicly owned buildings in Town have an accessible entrance except Town Hall which is currently not in use. Plans are proposed to repeat an assessment of public and private buildings to determine both major and minor barriers to use by people of all ages and abilities. The 2022 listening session found that accessibility to the full services of the Town Office and Library were significant barriers to use.
- The Age Friendly Committee is working with Committees responsible for the Merrymeeting Trail and Waterfront development to assure access by young and older residents and people with limited abilities.
- Significant efforts are underway to improve the safety of pedestrians through the proposed extension of sidewalks and the installation of crosswalks at major intersections. Such improvements affect all walkers, including older pedestrians, those with walkers or mobility devices and those pushing strollers.
- The Age Friendly Committee has made full accessibility to public meetings a major priority, including the use of effective sound systems, visual presentations, parking for those with disabilities and printed handouts.

Risks of Isolation Among Older Adults

- Of residents who are 65 years and over, 13% live alone. While living alone does not itself bring isolation, often it results from the loss of a spouse or partner, separation from family or lack of financial options to move. There is growing evidence of the connection between isolation and the onset of physical and mental conditions.
- Concern was raised during the 2022 listening sessions that older adults often are reluctant to ask for help and instead wait until a crisis before reaching out. Living outside of the Village was seen as an added factor contributing to isolation from the community, its activities and services.
- Since the hiring of a part time Older Adults Services Coordinator, there has been a growing awareness of the overlap among various service entities in town (Ride Share, Fire & Rescue, Food Pantry) with respect to serving at-risk residents. A development of a coalition of these stakeholders is planned to better identify high risk residents and to coordinate responses.
- Ninety percent of residents 65 years and over have a computer at home and 79% have broadband internet access. However, the pandemic raised awareness that many older adults lack the skills to fully use their computers to access medical, financial or personal services. In conjunction with the Age Friendly Committee, the Library developed a Digital Literacy Program to help address this “digital divide” and continues to expand its classes and workshops to meet the needs of all residents, including older adults.

Civic, Social and Economic Benefits of Older Adults to the Community

- Many programs and services in Town are dependent on the volunteer time of older residents for their operations. A disproportionate number of older adults serve as members on Town committees. The Food Pantry, Library, Rides in Neighbors’ Cars, Historical Association, and Bookstore depend on the volunteer efforts of older adults. Bowdoinham’s financial health and economy relies on the spending, taxes and employment of older adults.
- Labor force participation of older residents in Bowdoinham remains high. One out of every three residents who are 60 years and over work. Their spending helps the local economy, stabilizes a stagnant workforce, and transfers knowledge and skills across generations.

Labor Participation of Older Adults, 2020	
60 to 64 years	73%
65 to 74 years	26%
75 years+	11%
TOTAL 60 years+	49%

Source: 2020 U.S. Census

(2) *A complete inventory of area resources for older adults can be found on the Town’s Age Friendly website. A more general review of major local resources is given below.*

Bowdoinham’s Older Adults’ Services Coordinator serves as the Town’s liaison to older residents as well as implements and oversees locally sponsored services and programs, and partners with local, regional and state resources on issues affecting older adults. The Town also has had access to Fellowship Programs and consultants through grants awarded by AARP and the Maine Center on Aging.

The Committee for Age Friendly Bowdoinham advocates for policy changes as well as identifies and seeks grant funds to support programs, events and resources for older adults. The Committee is part of a larger network of Age Friendly communities in the State that brings insights, tools and

assistance to advance the Town's understanding of emerging trends and initiatives to improve the lives of older residents.

Partnerships with local and state entities helps to expand available resources to residents. These include AARP which has funded digital literacy and accessibility initiatives at the Bowdoinham Public Library as well as the development of an educational brochure on universal design concepts in housing; Maine Community Foundation funding for lunch and recreational programs during the pandemic; Maine Center on Aging which provided staff support through their Fellowship Program; MidCoast Hospital sponsored vaccine clinics for Bowdoinham residents; Richmond Senior Center co-sponsored a series of talks on the connection of mental health and physical conditions and partners with Bowdoinham in operating the Twin Town Handy Brigade to assist older residents with chores; the Bowdoinham Food Pantry works with Age Friendly to help target our programs to at-risk and isolated residents; CASHMaine offers free state and federal tax preparation and trains our volunteers to assist in that effort; the Bath-Brunswick Resource Council meets monthly with surrounding communities to share resources and information across major stakeholders whose work brings them into close contact with older adults; and the Merrymeeting Trail Committee is developing a 25 mile regional rail-with-trail from Topsham to Gardiner that can be used by people of all ages and abilities.

Volunteer led Support Services:

- Medical Equipment Program provides equipment and devices on a short or long term basis
- Rides in Neighbors' Cars matches residents needing rides with volunteer drivers
- Sand Bucket Brigade delivers sand to local residents
- The Twin Town Handy Brigade is a joint program with Richmond offering volunteer assistance with small chores in the home
- Digital literacy programs at the Bowdoinham Public Library offers in person and online classes to help older adults build their skills in using digital devices for personal, professional or educational purposes

Social Activities and Events

- Monthly luncheons followed by speakers at the Fire House
- Weekly cribbage, bridge, yoga, and line dancing
- Participation in Celebrate Bowdoinham and Smelt Festival

Spectrum Generations is a state designated agency responsible for assisting older adults and those living with disabilities to access information and services for which they qualify.

Richmond Health Center and OASIS Clinic offer free or low-cost access to preventive and health care services.

Bowdoinham Estates is a 25-unit subsidized housing complex for older adults and those living with disabilities.

Midcoast Hospital and MidCoast Senior Health Center offer a full range of medical and ancillary services as well as educational programs for older adults.

Emergency Medical Services are currently offered through Northeast Ambulance, which subcontracts to Lisbon Rescue to service our calls. Mutual aid also is provided by Topsham and

Gardiner Rescues if needed. Bowdoinham EMS department currently has 8 licensed members (1 EMR and 7 EMTs).

Physical Resources. The Town has no dedicated physical space that serves as a community center for residents. The Fire House makes their facilities available to Age Friendly for monthly luncheons as well as cribbage and bridge. The Town provides funding each year to help underwrite expenses for events that are held at Merrymeeting Hall including yoga and online dancing. The local Baptist Church has given Age Friendly space to conduct luncheons and offer speakers. All events are open to the public. In conjunction with Recreation, the Community School opens its gym each Wednesday evening to pickleball players and walkers. There has been interest in establishing a Senior Center in Bowdoinham where older residents can congregate on an impromptu and scheduled basis for social, physical, emotional and intellectual pursuits.

Analysis

(1) Is it realistic for residents to remain living independently in Bowdoinham as they age?

Many studies show that people generally want to stay in a familiar setting when they age, to be as independent as possible, and to have access to help when needed. The goal of the Age Friendly movement is to extend the option of living at home (whether alone, with a spouse or others) for as long as possible. For some this may mean downsizing to a smaller, more accessible home or making adaptations to their current homes. Others may need transportation or someone to help with chores around the house. For most, having a reliable source to help navigate services and options is also critical to retaining independence. The goals of the 2034 Comprehensive Plan aim to provide a structure and approach for supporting older adults as their needs change.

(2) Are there sufficient resources in Bowdoinham to meet the needs of older residents?

Bowdoinham is a small community with limited resources. Yet working within our means there are multiple approaches for expanding services to older residents. Many of our social and support programs operate solely by volunteers, whether donating or dispensing medical equipment, providing rides, carrying sand buckets and hosting luncheons. Partnerships also are vital to connecting the Town to resources from surrounding larger communities. Twin Town Handy Brigade is a joint venture with the Richmond Senior Center that broadens the availability of volunteer workers to do small repairs for residents. Through outreach to MidCoast Hospital we were able to set aside 2 days for Bowdoinham residents to receive COVID, flu or RVS vaccines. Bowdoinham's participation in the Bath-Brunswick Resource Council has increased awareness of area resources and opportunities for additional partnerships. Pursuing grant awards has made new projects possible, such as the Library's digital literacy program and a new ramp, Fellowships through Maine Center on Aging have increased staff capacity to conduct resident focus groups to learn more about emerging needs. Our goal is to continue to pursue volunteers, partnerships, and grants to expand options for supporting older residents, develop pilot programs, and learn from the experience of others to find solutions to issues facing our residents.

(3) Are there effective mechanisms to coordinate the work of Age Friendly with other priority initiatives in the Town and Region?

The inclusion of an Age Friendly section in the 2034 Comprehensive Plan is an important first step to assuring that the values and work of Age Friendly are integrated in all aspects of Town plans, policies and practice. Similarly, through both formal and informal relationships, Age Friendly maintains regular communication with the Town's Select Board and Committees to make sure our activities do not duplicate or conflict with that of others. The Older Adults Services Coordinator is pivotal in helping the Committee stay knowledgeable about Town activities and discussions that may have implications for its work. As part of the Age Friendly Network in Maine, we learn about emerging issues and successful solutions that can be adapted for Bowdoinham. We work closely with our Maine State Representative to assure we are up to date on legislation and initiatives that relate to our work so that we are aligned with current policy. Through its own projects and its advocacy for the work of others in Town, Age Friendly seeks to integrate its efforts and work cooperatively with Town partners and stakeholders to create cohesive and integrated strategies that improve the lives of all residents, young and old.