

Age Friendly Ross

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Council members, staff, and members of the Ross community. Tonight, we celebrate a special milestone, the completion of the Town of Ross's AARP Age-Friendly Cycle, marked by the presentation of this commemorative plaque.

Ross earned the AARP age-friendly designation in 2018 and was formalized in 2019 by an AARP representative at the October 2019 Town Council meeting. What does it mean to be an age-friendly community?

As an age-friendly community, we are part of a remarkable global movement, the Age-Friendly Cities and Communities Program, which was launched by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2007. The WHO recognized that aging well depends not just on health care, but on the environments in which we live, work, and connect with others. Through a county-wide survey conducted by the County of Marin in 2019, Ross residents, aged 60 and over, helped identify our community's key needs.

The survey told us we needed:

- More activities for older adults
- Stronger emergency preparedness
- Accessible sidewalks and public spaces
- Better transportation, and easier access to health resources

These needs were compiled into a 2021-2024 action plan, and in 2020, the Town of Ross launched the Age-Friendly Task Force to develop and be guided by a four-year action plan based on these needs.

With the task force-generated plan as a guide, and working with our town partners, we have made great progress. The task force meets regularly, is part of the Ross Leadership Council, and is supported with annual funding by you, the Town.

Utilizing these resources, we've improved Ross Commons, adding senior-friendly benches and planning enhancements to make outdoor spaces and activities accessible and welcoming for our seniors. We've expanded social participation, offering tai chi and yoga classes, quarterly breakfasts with guest speakers, and an annual Valentine Luncheon, which honors older residents.

Communication has also been strengthened. We now include age-friendly updates in our newsletter, distribute flyers and postcards, and maintain a dedicated information area at the Ross Post Office, which we all know is the central hub for Ross residents.

Emergency preparedness has been a priority. The task force contributed to the town's emergency plans, hosted wildfire preparedness events, and participated in a successful evacuation exercise.

Our success has been made possible through strong community partnerships, and this, I think, is really key to who we are as a town. It includes the Ross Property Owners Association, Branson and Ross Schools, our business community, Cedars, the Brent Art and Garden Center, and others. This is a group effort, and we thank the staff and all of you for your participation in helping us.

Task Force members bring dedication and energy. One of our founders now serves on the Town Council. We proudly participate in community events, including the 4th of July Parade carrying our age-friendly banner. We look at all Ross-sponsored activities through an age-friendly lens and make recommendations to the Council and other organizations on ways to involve seniors.

Today, over 25% of our residents are over the age of 60, and that number will continue to grow. Age-friendly initiatives strengthen social connections, promote safety and health, and make Ross a more accessible, welcoming, and inclusive community. Looking ahead, we will conduct another needs assessment, expand intergenerational activities and continue our quarterly breakfasts with speakers, and Valentine's Luncheon, which is open to all seniors aged 60 plus, in Ross, maintains emergency preparedness education and exercises, and ensure that our Common and sidewalks remain safe and age-friendly.

Our goal is clear. We want Ross to be a leader in healthy and active ageing. A community where older adults are valued, supported, and fully engaged, and where everyone benefits from a stronger and more connected town.