



NEWS RELEASE

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Age-Friendly Akron Summit strategic plans approved by WHO and AARP

County Executive Ilene Shapiro, Akron Mayor Dan Horrigan and Direction Home Akron Canton CEO Gary Cook are pleased to announce the World Health Organization (WHO) and AARP recently approved the County's and City's Age-Friendly Strategic Plans. In partnership with Direction Home, both are members of the WHO and AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities, a global effort to make communities more livable for people of all ages, especially older adults.

Summit County and Akron each began the Age-Friendly process in 2019 in recognition of changing community demographics. AARP estimates by 2040 one in every five people in the United States will be 65 or older. Both communities embraced Age-Friendly as a means of ensuring the City and County are more livable for people of all ages, especially the growing older adult population.

"We recognize that our community is aging," said County Executive Shapiro, "We must be strategic about how we invest in Summit County if we are going to serve current and future generations. Age-Friendly is a perfect platform to convene key community stakeholders with residents to continue to make Summit County a better place to live, work, and play, especially for older adults."

"We know from a recent AARP survey that 77% of older adults want to age in place, and there's no doubt helping them do so makes sense for everyone," said AARP Ohio Director Holly Holtzen. "Older residents earn money, pay taxes and purchase many goods and services, particularly locally. An age-friendly community sustains not only the individual but the entire Akron-Summit region, and that will become

even more critical in just six short years when Ohio will have more people over the age of 65 than under the age of 18 for the first time in our history.”

With financial support from Akron Community Foundation, Akron and Summit County worked with planning NEXT in 2021 and 2022 to draft their strategic plans. Both plans were crafted using resident feedback collected through direct mail surveys, online surveys and virtual meetings. Each plan contains about 40 direct actions residents would like to see implemented. Recognizing the similarities between the plans and the collaborative nature of social services in Summit County, the County and City combined their Age-Friendly initiatives last year and are now working in tandem to implement the strategic plans.

"What we've learned as we work to create an Age-Friendly city, is that what is good for our aging adults ultimately benefits all our residents," said Akron Mayor Dan Horrigan. "Investing in Age-Friendly initiatives is an investment into Akron's future, and I'm proud to make that commitment. I want to thank all of the stakeholders involved in this process including County Executive Shapiro, Direction Home Akron Canton, and Akron's Commission on Aging."

In late 2022, both strategic plans were submitted to the WHO and AARP for review, and both were quickly approved. This stamp of approval means Akron and Summit County have met the Age-Friendly requirements and are well-positioned for implementation. City, County and Direction Home staff regularly convene a diverse group of community stakeholders and have identified several strategic actions they will work in implement in 2023. The coalition looks forward to sharing more details in the coming months. Residents interested in participating in this process can complete a [survey](#) to join the initiative.

“The approval of the County’s and City’s plan by WHO provides the final step in the planning process,” said Gary Cook “The guidance and resources we can access as part of this network continues to be a valuable resource as the committee works now on implementation of the plan. We are happy to help lead these efforts along with County Executive Shapiro and Mayor Horrigan’s offices and the core committee. All this work will result in results focused on successful aging in the community.”

County Executive Shapiro is also pleased to announce the American Planning Association recently awarded Summit County’s Age-Friendly Strategic Plan a Vernon Deines Merit Award for an Outstanding Small Town or Rural Plan (Large Jurisdiction). This award is given annually to an outstanding comprehensive plan or special project.

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