

READERS' FORUM

BURLINGTON CAN BE A LIVABLE COMMUNITY FOR ALL AGES

As the people of Burlington age, will our community be ready? Burlington has repeatedly been cited as one of America's most livable communities for children and families. But is it or will it be, one of America's most livable communities for people of all ages? Or, looking at it another way, will residents of Burlington be able to say, "This is a great place to grow old?"

There is no single formula for meeting the needs of an aging population. But elements surely include affordable and appropriate housing, options for mobility, and community services. These exist to one degree or an-

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other in Burlington. And we have made great strides in building a strong local economy, making our downtown a vibrant and welcoming place, revitalizing our waterfront, and improving the quality of life in our neighborhoods — all of which contribute to Burlington's livability.

However, we have yet to craft an explicit vision of how our community can become more livable for older citizens.

Burlington is not alone. Too many cities fail to focus sufficiently on livability as it relates to the aging (which means all of us, eventually). Too often, as a result, older residents struggle in homes that don't meet their needs, find themselves forced to move to unfamiliar places, and suffer isolation in communities that don't support them. Diminishing quality of life and declining health follow.

These trends can be counteracted. Affordable housing options can enable seniors to remain in the communities to which they have long-term attachments. Sound design can ensure that individ-

uals remain able to enjoy the full use of their homes as they age. Appropriate community services and facilities can ease isolation. Adequate public transportation and other mobility options can allow nondrivers to stay active and connected to their communities. Safe, pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods with good sidewalks, accessible grocery stores and recreational facilities, and plenty of social opportunities can bring people of all ages together and serve their needs.

But, to achieve this, every community must take steps to identify those measures, policies, and amenities necessary to ensure true livability

for all. That is why the city of Burlington, AARP Vermont, and other community organizations are uniting to launch the Burlington Livable Community Project.

Together we will reach out to residents to assess needs, crystallize a vision, and identify concrete actions that will make Burlington one of America's best places

to grow old. In doing so, we will become one of the first communities in the country to chart a clear course for the future that addresses the needs of its aging population. People of all ages — all of us — will reap the benefits.

Peter Clavelle is aging in place as the seven-term mayor of Burlington.