**Lifelong Communities:**
Solutions for an Aging Population

*Lifelong Communities* are places where individuals can live throughout their lifetime. Older adults both want and plan to “age in place”. In a recent survey, 83% of the region’s 55+ population said they plan to remain in their community as long as possible. But many older adults, after raising their children, paying their mortgage and contributing to neighborhood, civic and religious organizations find that it is difficult, and for many, impossible to stay.

A *Lifelong Community* fosters a high quality of life by offering options to all residents regardless of age. Family size, health status, entertainment, shopping, social and supportive needs, even the willingness and/or ability to mow the yard, change with age. In a *Lifelong Community* individuals may change, but their community can remain the same.

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**Promote Housing and Transportation Options**
A wide range of housing types support a wide range of housing needs. Many older adults can no longer maintain the homes in which they raised their children. Condos, apartments, duplexes and quadruplexes allow older adults to downsize, reduce yard maintenance and live close to neighbors. Housing with sidewalks, greenspace and near shopping promotes both active living and an alternative to driving.

Transportation options are essential to those who cannot safely drive. Altering routes during off peak hours, enhancing bus stops and offering senior discounts on public transit can increase senior ridership. Supportive transportation programs that are both flexible and affordable can allow even frail older adults to maintain their independence.

**Encourage Healthy Lifestyles**
Preventative healthcare is the cheapest healthcare, but too many older adults do not access basic services. Flu shots, pneumonia vaccines, diabetes management, regular exercise and healthy eating are simple actions that are difficult to take without support. Public health services targeted to older adults, wellness centers, disease specific support groups, parks, walking trails, nutrition and strengthening programs, social activities and volunteer opportunities keep older adults healthy and engaged.

**Increase Access to Services and Resources**
Atlantans are living longer than ever and while longevity has its benefits, it can also leave older adults and families to struggle with complicated insurance programs, challenging financial and investment options, housing choices and in-home services. No one should have to make these choices alone and in the dark. Comprehensive counseling and information resources provide individuals and families with the right information at the right time.

The Atlanta region’s older adult population is experiencing unprecedented growth. This tremendous change provides the opportunity to re-imagine community life. Transforming existing neighborhoods, cities and counties into Lifelong Communities will insure that Greater Atlanta is Great for a Lifetime.
Atlanta, like the rest of the country and many parts of the world, is experiencing a dramatic increase in its older adult population. Between 2000 and 2015 the aging population is expected to double. By 2030, one in five residents will be over the age of 60.

The region has no choice, but to respond to and plan for this growth. To be effective, a regional strategy must be based on local plans and in local action. It must reflect the desire of older adults to stay in their communities as long as they can.

The Atlanta Regional Commission is working with local communities to insure that the region is a Lifelong Community – a place where anyone, no matter their age, will want to live. Bringing together a wide range of expertise, local partnerships are addressing policy, program and systems change. They are creating housing and transportation options, promoting healthy living, expanding outreach and education.

**Creating local policy to support housing options.** Enacting zoning policy which supports a wide range of housing types. Reviewing tax policy to insure rising values won’t force older adults from their homes.

**Crafting a local vision for senior housing.** Finding areas of the community best suited for new and affordable senior housing: located close to services and within walkable communities.

**Expanding transportation voucher and volunteer programs.** Piloting innovation in local public transit including training older adults who might be first time riders, improving the elder-friendliness of bus stops and routes.

**Promoting physical activity and social interaction.** Creating walking clubs in local neighborhoods and senior centers. Advocating for the needs of older adults in local parks and recreation planning.

**Increasing access to preventive health care.** Bringing together local health departments, senior services and hospitals to provide flu shots, screenings, pneumonia vaccines and disease management.

**Addressing gaps in healthcare for older adults.** Providing vision, dental and hearing services not covered by Medicare through local alliances.

**Modernizing information and access services.** Expanding outreach and education to include retirement planning for pre-retirees. Employing the internet and other technologies to meet the needs of future consumers.

**Increasing the capacity of professionals serving older adults.** Cross-training among service professionals to insure that wherever an older adult or caregiver turns, they receive the most comprehensive information available.