Lifelong Communities Handbook: Creating Opportunities for Lifelong Living

An element of the Atlanta Regional Commission Regional Plan
Lifelong Communities Design Handbook

Communities should be places where people of all ages and abilities can live as long as they’d like, but all too often, individuals find that the community in which they have lived for years no longer meets their needs. The Atlanta Regional Commission supports the following principles and design standards through its comprehensive regional plan. Lifelong Communities provide an array of housing types that appeal to individuals both young and old, opportunities for healthy living with ways to get around that meet the needs of individuals who do not drive, safe sidewalks and interesting places to walk, and convenient access to shopping and basic services. Those features are summed up in the three goals of a Lifelong Community:

1. Provide housing and transportation options
2. Encourage healthy lifestyles
3. Expand access to services

Lifelong Communities incorporate seven principles:

- **Connectivity** – Providing the most options for getting from one place to another, reduces traffic and creates a viable street network for multiple modes of transportation

- **Pedestrian Access and Transit** – Creating a vibrant streetscape, destinations worth walking to, connected and safe sidewalks and transit, both within the community and to regional hubs

- **Neighborhood Retail and Services** – Permitted within walking distances of housing to reduce auto travel, increase walkability and provide for sustainable community hubs

- **Social Interaction** – Resulting from the provision of adequate green space, community centers, neighborhood gardens and more

- **Diversity of Dwelling Types** – Allowing individuals to remain within the community as their needs and preferences change

- **Healthy Living** – Growing out of an environment that promotes physical activity (trails and bike paths), neighborhood-scale groceries offering fresh fruits and vegetables and health clinics and medical offices within walking distance
Consideration for Existing Residents – Providing options for existing residents to remain in the community as redevelopment occurs

These principles are tools to help community leaders, planners, developers and citizens create communities that meet the goals of a Lifelong Community.

This handbook serves as a reference to ensure development and community design adhere to the Lifelong Communities principles, resulting in communities and neighborhoods that are designed to promote healthy living, deliver comprehensive accessibility from inside the dwelling, down the street and into the restaurant, theater or store and offer targeted programming that meets the new reality of increasing life expectancies, varying levels of abilities and the needs of all ages.

The handbook is organized around the above principles and shows how they are applied at four levels: the building, the street, the community and the region.
Lifelong Mobility and Accessibility provide access and transportation to people of all ages and abilities. Real mobility begins inside the individual unit or house and carries throughout the entire built environment.

Building Scale

- New construction at a minimum that incorporates potential for accessibility retrofit
- Adequate lighting in critical areas

Street Scale

- Streets that are welcoming and unintimidating
- Traffic calming strategies that make the environment feel safe
- Plantings and fencing positioned to reduce traffic noise
- Engaging frontages that include diverse urban and building form that vary in style, color and material
- Walkable/fall-safe sidewalks
- Sidewalks that are closely managed during any construction and repair to avoid barriers to access in the pedestrian environment
- Sidewalks that are closely managed over time to avoid cluttering of pedestrian environment with vending machines, newspaper stands, signage and other street furniture
- Grade level changes that are clearly marked and well-lit
- Handrails installed where appropriate
- Curb cuts at all intersections
- Sidewalk paving
  - Non-reflective and textural contrast to walls
  - Flat and non-slip
- Trees for shade
❖ Sensory cues at decision points, such as junctions or grade changes
❖ Adequate pedestrian lighting
❖ Crossable streets
   ❑ Crosswalk markings that are appropriate and well maintained
   ❑ Traffic signals mounted at the sidewalk rather than suspended
   ❑ Cross walks at signalized intersections as appropriate
   ❑ Signal timing suitable for slower walking speeds (3 ft/sec or lower)
   ❑ Countdown crossing signals installed
   ❑ Traffic calming strategies to slow speeds
   ❑ Refuge islands for more than 2 lanes of traffic
❖ Accommodation for specialized vehicles (power chairs, golf carts, etc.)
❖ Sitting arrangements to provide respite and facilitate conversation
❖ Sturdy seating with arm and back rests, made of appropriate materials
❖ Covered bus stops with seating
❖ Areas of sun and shade considered in the design of the street
❖ Gates and doors requiring no more than 5 pounds of pressure to open and having lever handles

**Community Scale**
❖ Consideration given to required vegetative buffers and pedestrian access
❖ Consideration given to parking requirements and pedestrian access
❖ Centralized transit waiting areas
❖ Transit stops that provide protection from rain, wind and sun
❖ Smart transit technology that alerts riders to bus/shuttle’s arrival time
❖ Smart transit technology alerts bus drivers to riders waiting in covered or sheltered waiting areas
❖ Stops for shuttles, jitneys, buses and light rail
Regional Scale

- Neighborhood center transit stops
- Provision of bus rapid transit and light rail
- Transit training for previous non-riders
- Transit/shuttle driver training to accommodate needs of older riders
- Flex routing during off-peak hours to provide door-to-door or curb-to-curb service
- Access to interregional travel including airport, train and bus stations

Lifelong Dwellings incorporate elements that allow the building to change with its inhabitants rather than inhabitants having to constantly find new dwellings as their needs change. Outside of individual units, a community must contain a full range of housing types including varying housing sizes, products, supportive housing and even skilled nursing care to ensure that those who have invested in a place’s social and civic infrastructure can remain there as their needs change.

Building Scale

- Accommodations for caregivers, older family members or adult children
- Adequate lighting
- Smaller lots and smaller front setbacks for neighbor interaction
- A zero step entry
- Full bath and living on main floor
- Wider doorways on main floor, clear passage through hallways

Community Scale

- Diversity of housing (varying sizes, products)
- Accessibility of housing products
Workforce housing
- Range of supportive housing types
- Range of specialized housing types (cohousing, models that address dementia or other disabilities)
- Accessible spaces as appropriate based on community accessibility standards

**Lifelong Social Interaction.** Social interaction is critical at all ages and stages of life, but particularly as one grows older. Isolation can dramatically increase physical, mental health, and isolation problems. It is critical that the built environment facilitate significant social interaction and the creation of a supportive community at every opportunity. These items foster social interaction:

**Building Scale**
- Sitting areas provided on the main entrances
- Common rooms and shared dining areas
- Out-buildings (e.g. workshop or garage)
- Small-scale activity spaces, including card rooms, TV rooms, reading rooms
- Flexible space for emerging interests and activities

**Street Scale**
- Front yard gardens, porches and stoops
- Reinforcement of found gathering places

**Community Scale**
- Community rooms (large enough for exercise classes, meetings, movies)
- Opportunities for meaningful volunteer activities (e.g. after-school tutoring)
Active and passive open space such as:

- Dog parks
- Age-integrated activity space including playgrounds and schoolyards
- Community gardens

Third-places such as:

- Parks and recreation
- Barber shops, beauty salons
- Coffee shops, bars
- Community centers, senior centers, intergenerational programming

Regional Scale

Access to cultural activities, educational and entertainment venues

Lifelong Healthy Living: Living longer is the great benefit of living in this century, but getting and staying healthy is essential to maintaining a high quality of life. Community design must facilitate access to basic and preventive healthcare and encourage physical activity. These items support healthy living:

Building Scale

- Fall-safe environment
- Infrastructure to support adaptive medical technology and monitoring
- Accessible and visitable spaces as appropriate based on community accessibility standards

Street Scale

- Daily needs within safe and inviting walking distance
- Fall-safe environment
Shorter block sizes
Walkable destinations

**Community Scale**
- Designated walking loop
- Exercise and recreation venues (e.g. bocce, dancing, tennis, yoga, tai chi)
- Swimming pool
- Community equipped with access to health services and education
- Community concierge (and case management)
- Neighborhood access to healthy foods

**Regional Scale**
- Transit or shuttle connection to major medical centers and hospitals

**Lifelong Access to Services.** Lifelong Communities must provide access to a full range of basic and supportive services. Services should range from basic daily needs to more specialized skilled care.

**Building Scale**
- Range of in home services (medical, support and social services)

**Street Scale**
- Community bulletin boards
- Wayfinding signage
**Community Scale**

- Community must have local access to ordinary daily needs which may include a location-appropriate mix of some of the following programs:
  - Groceries offering fresh fruits and vegetables
  - Dry cleaner
  - ATM/Bank
  - Drugstore
  - Beauty/barber shops, nail salons
  - Post office
  - Restaurants
  - Bakery
  - Hardware store
  - Physician offices (including vision and dental services)
  - In-home medical and supportive services
  - Facilities with skilled nursing care
  - Lifelong learning opportunities
  - Childcare and adult day care
  - Community concierge (which can include case management for older adults)

**Regional Scale**

- Hospitals
- Entertainment, educational and cultural venues
- Major and specialized shopping outlets
Other ARC Resources

**Livable Centers Initiative:** The Livable Centers Initiative encourages local jurisdictions to plan and implement strategies that link transportation improvements with land use development strategies to create sustainable, livable communities consistent with regional development policies.

[www.atlantaregional.com/land-use/livable-centers-initiative](http://www.atlantaregional.com/land-use/livable-centers-initiative)

**Community Choices:** Community Choices is a quality growth initiative that offers local governments tools, technical assistance and resources to help them create communities that best suit their unique visions.


**Lifelong Communities Initiative:**

[www.atlantaregional.com/llc](http://www.atlantaregional.com/llc)