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Evaluating Needs of Older Adults in Massachusetts Communities

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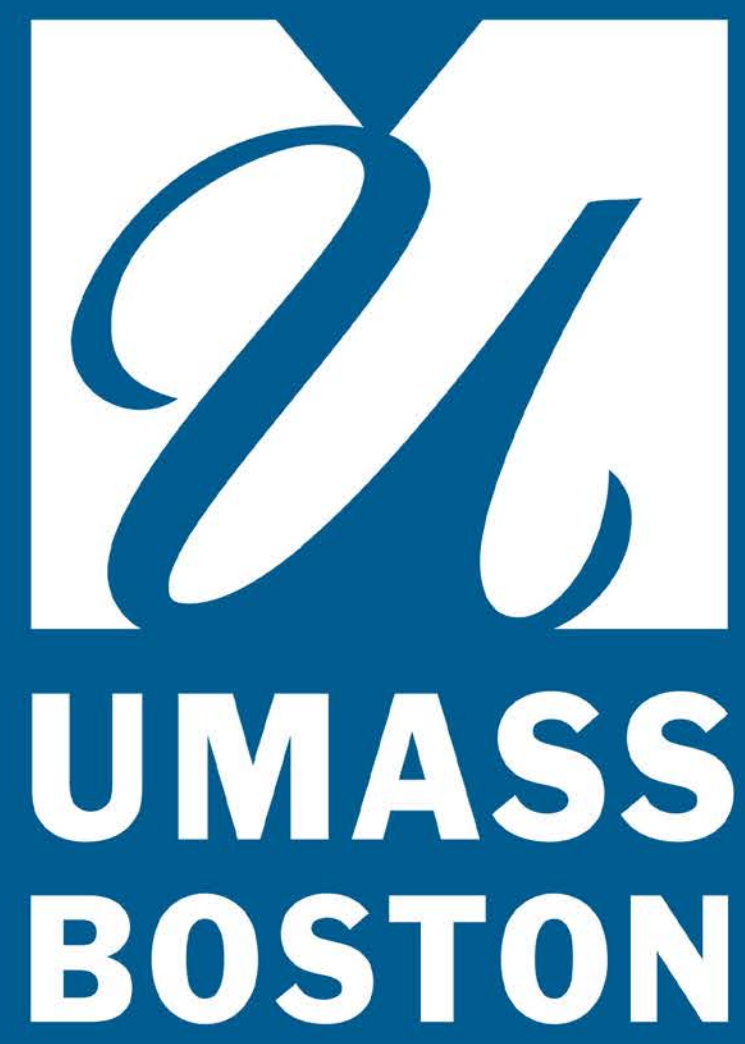
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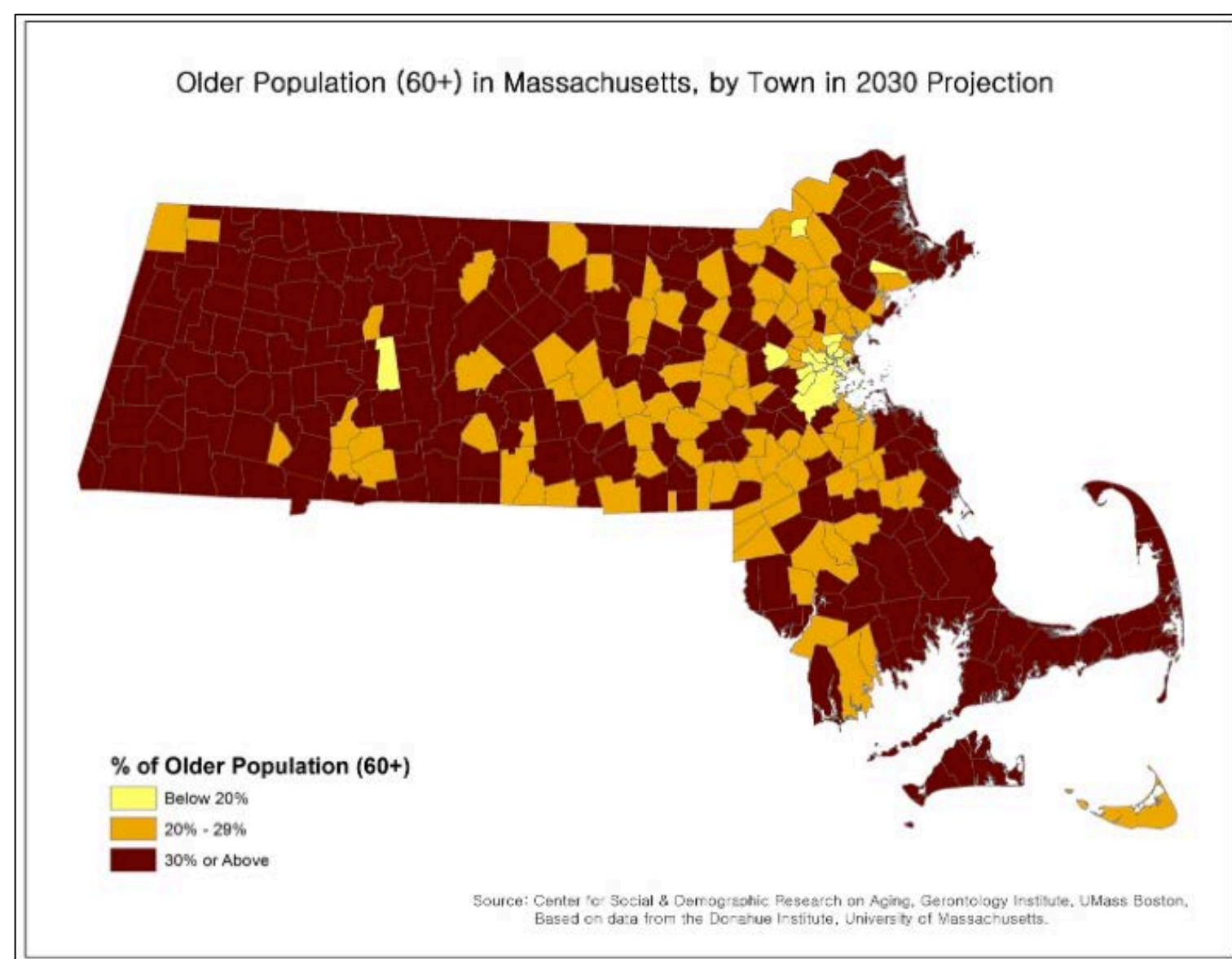
Evaluating Needs of Older Adults in Massachusetts Communities

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Background

Throughout Massachusetts, the ongoing demographic shift toward an older population has required most cities and towns to re-evaluate the adequacy of services and programs for older adults.

By 2030, the vast majority of municipalities in Massachusetts will have unprecedented proportions of people age 60 or over.



Community Partners

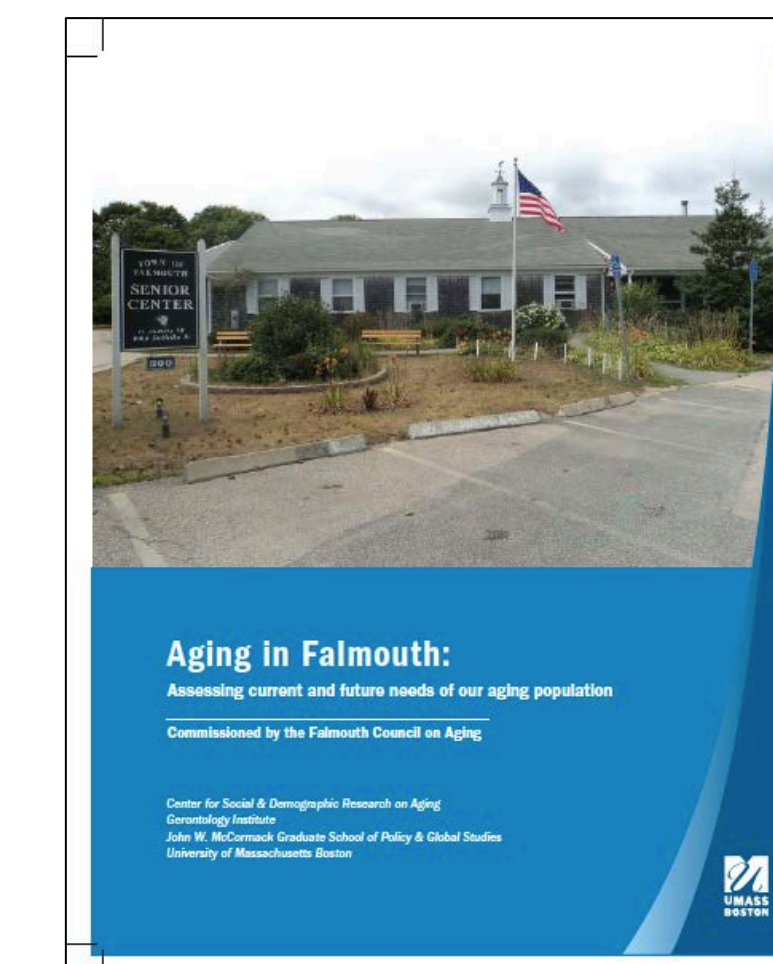
The Center for Social and Demographic Research on Aging (CSDRA) contracts with COAs in communities to conduct multicomponent needs assessments aimed at identifying gaps in programs and services, and bringing to light interests and preferences of older residents.

Results/Impacts

In contracting with CSDRA, individual communities usually have specific long-term goals. Anecdotal evidence suggests that evaluations have been used in various capacities to improve quality of life for older constituents served by COAs in communities.

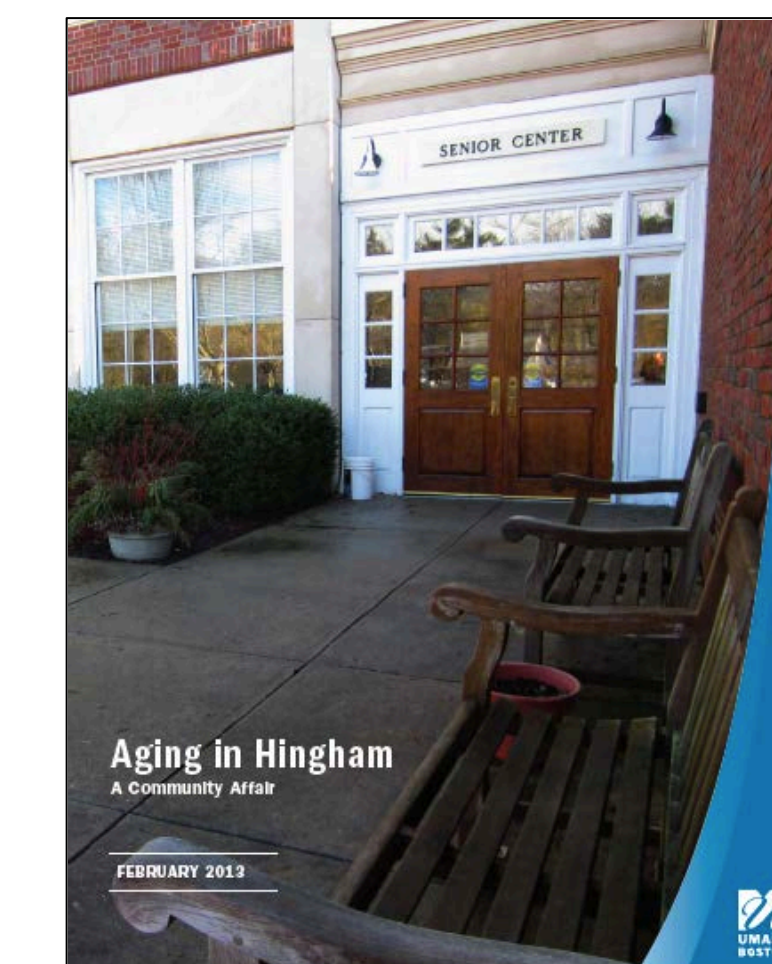
Approaches and Methods

A mix of quantitative and qualitative methods are used to develop multidimensional descriptions of towns, their demographics and services/programs, and to identify needs and preferences of older residents.



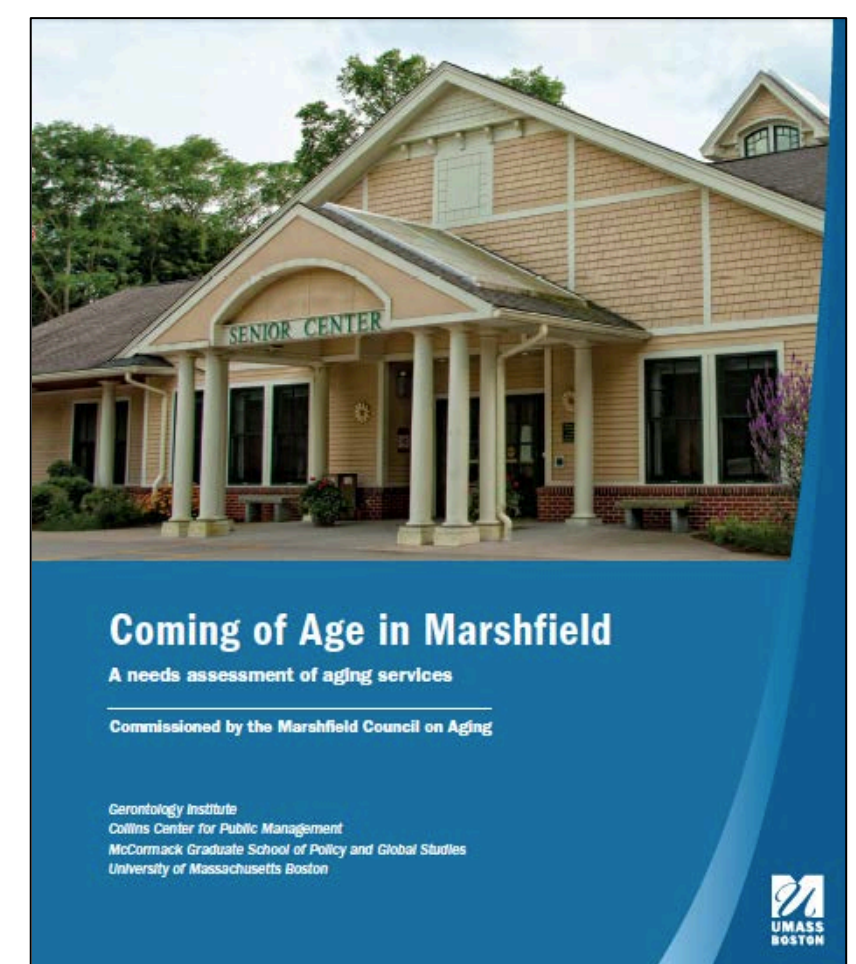
Falmouth, MA

Evaluation used as an educational tool for the whole community and the Town administration, as they seek to garner support and community buy-in for a new Senior Center.



Hingham, MA

Evaluation used as the basis for strategic planning for current and future service needs.



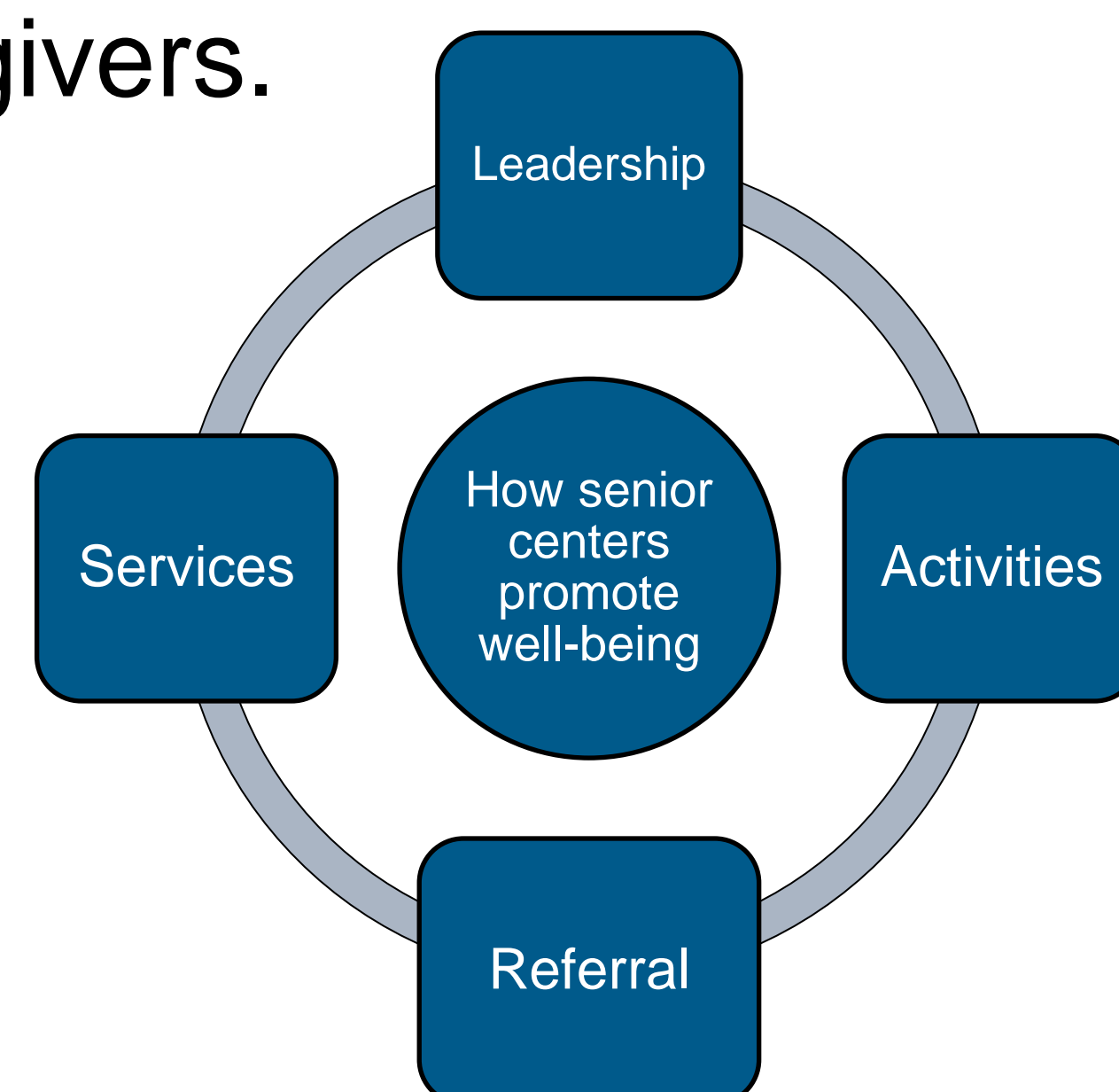
Marshfield, MA

Evaluation used to secure town support for a larger budget and more staff.

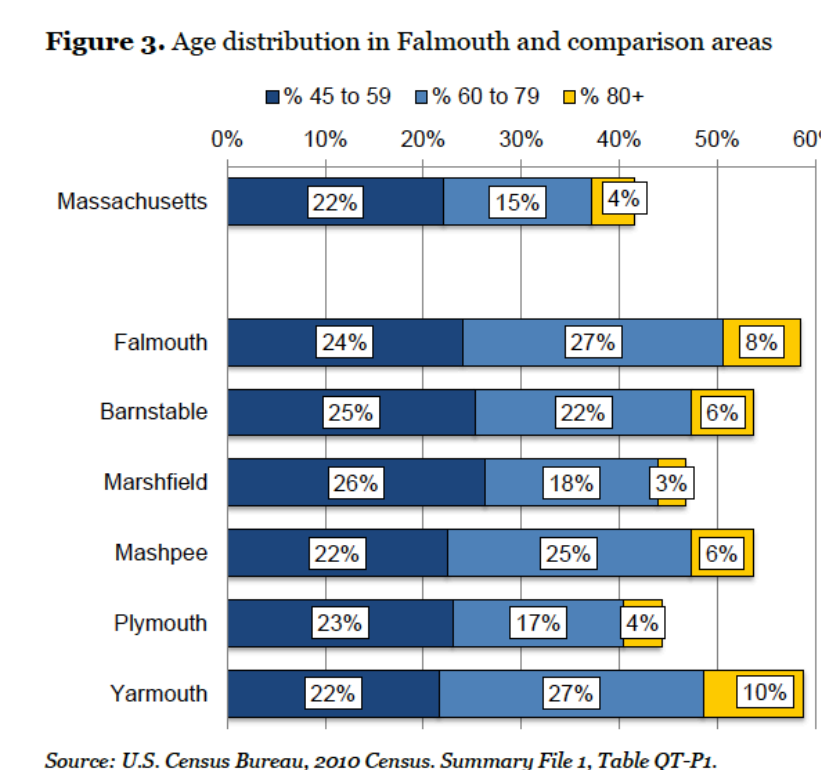
Councils on Aging

Most municipalities have Councils on Aging (COA) – agencies charged with establishing priorities, serving as advocates, and offering opportunities to elders, their families, and their caregivers.

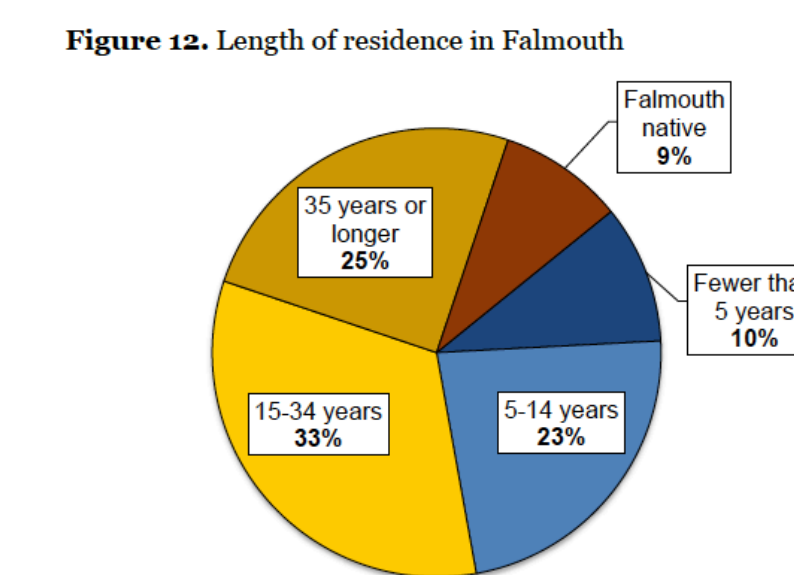
Senior Centers administered by COAs promote wellbeing via services, activities, leadership and referral to other needed services.



Secondary Data Analysis (U.S. Census)



Quantitative Survey Items



Open-ended Survey Items

Table 13. Most prevalent issues mentioned relating to Falmouth Council on Aging Senior Center or the current or future needs of older adult residents in Falmouth

Issues Mentioned

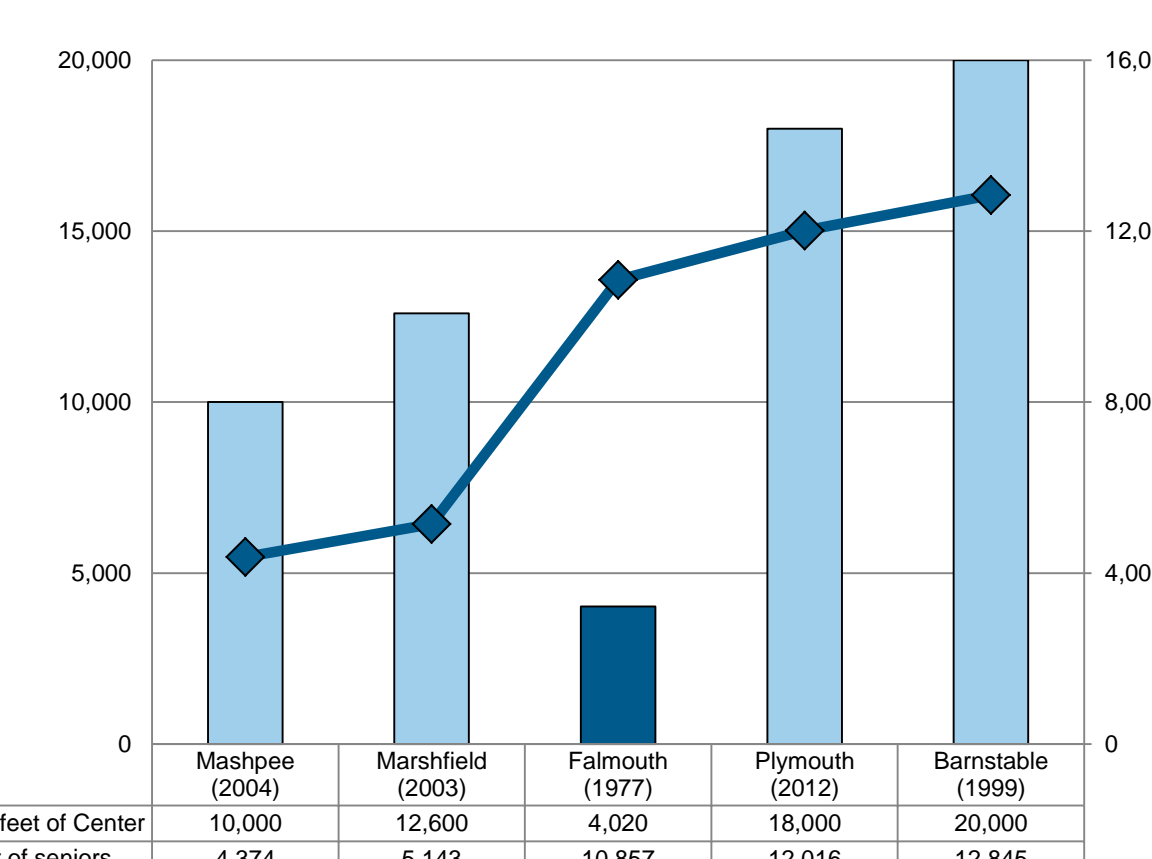
New senior center, more space, larger parking area
 "All I am saying is if you build it, they will come, the town is growing and getting older and we need to work on that idea."
 "A new building (is needed), the present one is too small to accommodate many programs, but the staff does an excellent job under somewhat adverse conditions."

Offer more services, a wider array of services or programs
 "Diet and exercise are so important to being healthy and independent. Programs of this type would be beneficial."
 "I am 76 and to get me interested in a new building would need a gym, coffee 'snack' bar, job training to keep people working or volunteering...not playing cards and waiting to die."

Senior Center programs and services are appreciated
 "Admirable number of choices for those in need or who desire of them. For those of us with family, friends, and health to not need them, their existence is nonetheless comforting."
 "I feel Falmouth is doing a good job, it's reassuring and exciting that things may even get better."

Provide more information about programs and services
 "I have never looked to see if the Falmouth Senior Center has a website that is current for events/activities. If not, they should and all correspondence should list the URL. They need to promote themselves."
 "I have to be honest, I didn't know Falmouth had a Falmouth Council on Aging. I've never been to the Senior Center and don't know where it is located."
 "A bigger outreach program (is required) to many who will never ask for help."

Community Comparison



What We Have Learned

- Communities often have difficulties justifying services and supports for older residents vis-à-vis their other competing needs.
- Communities lack good information about their residents, and this is a barrier to their planning.
- A major challenge lies in understanding how the needs of seniors can be met while simultaneously promoting livability for all residents in the community.