

University of Massachusetts Boston

ScholarWorks at UMass Boston

Center for Social and Demographic Research on
Aging Publications

Gerontology Institute

12-2022

Community Engagement and Planning: Reading Center for Active Living (ReCal)

Ceara Somerville

Caitlin Coyle

Beth Rouleau

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umb.edu/demographyofaging>



Part of the [Gerontology Commons](#)

Community Engagement and Planning: Reading Center for Active Living (ReCal)

December 2022

Commissioned by the Town of Reading

Center for Social and Demographic Research on Aging
Gerontology Institute
John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy & Global Studies
University of Massachusetts Boston





Office of the Town Manager
16 Lowell Street
Reading, MA 01867

781-942-9043
townmanager@ci.reading.ma.us
www.readingma.gov/town-manager

Dear Reading Residents,

I am pleased to share with you the report prepared by the Gerontology Institute at the University of Massachusetts which culminates a year-long planning process for a new senior/community center. The UMASS Gerontology Institute was hired to facilitate a planning and community engagement effort to identify the community's desire for a new senior/community center.

As the population of residents age 60+ in Reading continues to grow it is vitally important that the services provided continually evolve to deliver in a facility that is safe, accessible, and meets the needs of the community. The Pleasant Street Center (PSC) is a community resource (senior center) that has served the Town well over several decades albeit with constraints.

In 2017 the UMass Gerontology Institute conducted a Needs Assessment of the PSC and concluded that the building's limitations impact the ability to fully serve seniors. Both the programs that can be offered, and the number of participants that can be accommodated are restricted by the Pleasant Street Center's size and configuration.

Prior to the pandemic in 2020, the PSC benefited from small upgrades including an upgraded front desk area, a refurbished computer room, new window treatments, interior painting, and some new furnishings. A seasonal tent was added in 2021 which helped to bring people together outdoors in a safer way during the pandemic (just installed for 2022).

In the Fall of 2021, the Select Board created a 7-member Ad Hoc Committee known as ReCalc (Reading Center for Active Living Committee). ReCalc's charge was to explore the current and future needs of the community and initiate planning for a potential new senior/community center in town that will focus on residents age 60+ and possibly other members of the community.

ReCalc is focused on two main activities for collecting data: 1) benchmarking neighboring communities with both senior (age 60+) and multigenerational centers and 2) gathering community input and feedback on ideas for what should be included in the design of any new center. ReCalc conducted site visits to sixteen area centers to collect data in a uniform manner.

In the Spring of 2022 three (3) public forums were held and were one of the tools to gather community input into the planning process. The UMass team also conducted four (4) focus groups, attended several ReCalc meetings to get feedback and conducted a community survey.

Special thanks to ReCalc, the UMass Gerontology Institute and staff who worked tirelessly to create this community engagement work and of course thanks to our residents for your ideas, suggestions, and feedback! Well done everyone!!

Sincerely,

Fidel Maltez
Town Manager

Table of Contents

- Contributors and Acknowledgements iv**
- Executive Summary 1**
- Introduction 4**
- Methods 4**
- Results..... 6**
 - Community Forums..... 6**
 - Findings from Focus Groups 10**
 - Results from Community Survey..... 14**
- Conclusions and Recommendations..... 33**
- References 36**
- Appendix A: Demographic Profile of Reading..... 37**
- Appendix B: Survey Results..... 49**

Contributors and Acknowledgements

This report was produced by the Center for Social and Demographic Research on Aging (CSDRA), a research unit within the Gerontology Institute at UMass Boston's McCormack School. The CSDRA provides resources and research expertise to communities, non-governmental organizations, and other agencies throughout the Commonwealth.

Ceara Somerville, Caitlin Coyle, and Beth Rouleau are primarily responsible for the contents of this report. Other contributors include Saralyn Collins, Adriana Hernandez, Josef Kijewski, LMSW, and undergraduate students Daniel Caron, Bendu David, Roisin O'Keefe, Himani Pachchigar, and Sabrin Zahid.

We would like to acknowledge the Town of Reading for their support of this project. Specifically, we offer our appreciation to Jean Delios, Kevin Bohmiller, and Genevieve Fiorente for their leadership and guidance through this process. We thank the Reading Center for Active Living Committee (ReCalc) and the Council on Aging for their input and collaboration through every step of this project. As well, we are deeply grateful for every Reading resident that took time to participate in this endeavor.

For more information, contact:

The Center for Social and Demographic Research on Aging
Gerontology Institute
University of Massachusetts Boston
CSDRA@umb.edu | 617.287.7413

Recommended Citation

Somerville, C., Coyle, C., & Rouleau, B. "Community Engagement and Planning: Reading Center for Active Living (ReCal)" (2022). *Center for Social and Demographic Research on Aging Publications*.

Executive Summary

This report describes research undertaken by the Center for Social & Demographic Research on Aging (CSDRA) within the Gerontology Institute at the University of Massachusetts Boston, on behalf of the Town of Reading. The goals of this project were to (1) engage the community and (2) investigate the needs, interests, preferences, and opinions of Reading residents regarding the possibility of a new community or senior center. The content of this report is meant to inform the Reading Center for Active Living Committee (ReCalc) on its mission to *“explore the current and future needs of the community and initiate planning for a potential new senior/community center in town that will focus on residents aged 60+ and possibly other members of the community”*.

Data for this assessment were drawn from several sources, including

- 3 public community forums, conducted in various locations in Reading with virtual participation optional; 172 residents participated across the forums.
- 4 focus groups held with 54 key stakeholders who reside in Reading or work on behalf of the community.
- A resident survey developed and distributed for all Reading residents aged 18 and older, based on the most recent Town Census list. The survey was predominantly online, with options to pick up and drop off a paper copy at 3 locations in town, or to complete the survey over the phone with a member of the research team. A postcard encouraging participation and detailing access points was mailed to every individual resident aged 18 and older. A total of 1,470 residents took the time to complete a survey.
- Additional information obtained through the U.S. Census Bureau and other publicly available sources to contextualize the sociodemographic profile of Reading.

A broad range of findings are reported in this document, highlighting positive feedback as well as concerns about the potential for a new senior or community center, expressed by residents and other stakeholders. Many of our findings, and the recommendations that follow, intersect with the scope of responsibility held by many Boards and Departments in Reading; such that adequately responding to needs and concerns expressed in the community will require the involvement of other municipal offices and community stakeholders, and some will require a substantial collaborative effort. Thus, this report is intended to inform planning by the Reading Center for Active Living Committee as well as other Town offices, private and public organizations that provide services and advocate for older people within Reading, and the community at large.

Key Findings in Brief

- When asked about preference for a new senior or community center, 49% of survey respondents preferred an “all-ages community center including designated space and programming for residents age 60+.”
 - More than half of respondents under age 60 preferred an all-ages community center. In contrast, 36% of those in their 60s, 49% of those in their 70s, and

57% of respondents age 80 or older selected “senior center for residents age 60+” as their preference.

- Results from all data sources indicate that older residents are open to the idea of an all-ages community center, but value having their own space and experiences with peers.
- As well, 68% of all survey respondents reported that they would be likely or very likely to utilize a new senior/community center.
- Community forum participants highlighted the need for more information about the proposed new building prior to making a decision. As well, residents want to know how this initiative fits into the existing network of assets in the community.
- Cultivating an accessible and inclusive environment is necessary. Among the top priorities for a new space include low or no cost to participate, ample parking, and hours of operation that reflect the fact that more than half of survey respondents are working full or part time.
- Residents want to access space to participate in a variety of activities. Across age groups, multi-purpose spaces for both large and small group programs, area for indoor exercise classes, and café or meal space are among the top choices for how to design a new space.
- Beyond the physical space limitations (e.g., inability to host simultaneous programs, lack of a bathroom on the entry level, etc.), there was wide-recognition among focus group and forum participants that the staff of the Pleasant Street Center are maxed-out in their ability to meet the demands of the community. Suggestions for supporting and expanding the human services staff will be necessary to meet the wide array of resident needs and interests in a future space.

Recommendations for the Town of Reading

The following recommendations are made based on the information gathered from all components of this process. Although numbered for organizational purposes, the recommendations are not presented in no prioritized order.

1. Expand community awareness through active communication & public education about the planning process.

- Address strategies to improve awareness of and need for ReCalc and new community space.
 - For example, offer public tours of the Pleasant Street Center, highlighting the limitations of the space and equip members of ReCalc, COA, and Select Board with shared messaging about the project to ensure consistency in public education.
- Develop an inventory of existing programs and services available to Reading residents.
 - Consider resources by need (e.g., social services, healthcare, recreation) and age.
 - Document existing relationships with other organizations that serve Reading.

- Consider regular meetings with PSC staff and other local organizations (e.g., the Reading Public Library, the Burbank YMCA, local clergy, Reading Recreation, etc.) to improve collaboration and coordination of programs and services.

2. Improve accessibility and programming to ensure equitable access.

- Establish appropriate hours of operation that can accommodate working residents.
- Consider a multi-feature approach to transportation to improve accessibility:
 - Adequate parking spots
 - Satellite parking lot with shuttle transportation
 - Accessible via MBTA services
 - Develop door-to-door transportation services
- Develop infrastructure from an inclusive design perspective.
 - Consult existing resources for key design principles, such as those available through the [Massachusetts Age- and Dementia Friendly Integration Toolkit | Mass.gov](#)
- Maintain some separate space, programs, and services for older residents.
- Maintain core programs and services provided through Elder & Human Services.
- Maintain adequate access to food/nutrition services for older residents.
- Ensure that older residents have designated lounge space for informal gathering.
- Consider the development of inter-generational programming, in partnership with other town resources (e.g., Reading Public Library, Reading School Department).

3. Plan for a new center, including staffing levels consistent with demand.

- Include spaces that will support:
 - Small group or independent activities, such as book clubs, games, arts, and crafts
 - Exercise classes for large groups
 - Outdoor areas to relax or for light activity (e.g., lawn games, walking)
 - Regular opportunity to share a meal with others (e.g., congregate meals, café area)
 - Informal gathering and socialization
- Include large rooms that can accommodate many participants and that can be divided into multiple smaller rooms as well as be used for large community events.
- Account for classrooms and program rooms that have the technology for audio and visual presentations and the capability to receive participants who are participating virtually.
- Secure adequate private office spaces for staff to conduct 1-1 appointments with residents.
- Confirm ample staffing levels and appropriate positions to adequately serve residents.

Introduction

A [needs assessment](#) of older Reading residents was conducted in 2017, in collaboration with the Town of Reading's Public Services Department and the Center for Social & Demographic Research on Aging. Results suggested that the Pleasant Street Center (PSC) yields significant challenges in accessibility and the layout is not conducive to the volume and variety of programs and services that residents want to participate in (Coyle & Mutchler, 2017). Conclusions and recommendations reflected that the PSC can no longer meet the demand of Reading's older population. Given the continued growth of the older population in Reading¹ and overwhelming limitations of the PSC, the Reading Center for Active Living Committee (ReCalc) was convened by the Town in 2021, charged with assessing resident needs and interests to inform development of a potential new senior/community center, focused on residents age 60+ and possibly other members of the community.

This report presents results from a comprehensive evaluation of preferences, ideas, and concerns relating to the development of a new community or senior center. A community engagement process was undertaken to support the mission and planning process of ReCalc. By focusing on the needs and interests of residents regarding community gathering space, results presented in this report will inform Reading officials and staff, boards, and community organizations that interact with residents.

Methods

Methods used in compiling this report include analysis of existing data and primary data collection. Demographic material used in this report was drawn from the U.S. Census Bureau (the decennial censuses and the American Community Survey) and from projections generated by the Donahue Institute at the University of Massachusetts. Primary data was collected through qualitative methods, including community forums and focus groups, and through a community survey.

Community Forums

Between April and June 2022, 3 community forums were conducted in Reading—two in the Reading Public Library (RPL) and one at the PSC—with virtual participation optional. The purpose of the forums was to develop a better understanding of the needs and interests of Reading residents as they relate to programs, services, and the associated building space needs. Information gathered from community forum input was designed to inform subsequent development of survey and focus group instruments used in this assessment. Discussion at the forum focused on envisioning a Reading Center for Active Living in terms of populations served, programs and services offered, types and location of space, and opportunities and challenges. Across forums, over 100 people attended in person, with an additional 72 participants via Zoom.

¹ Refer to Appendix A for a full demographic profile of the Reading population.

Focus Groups

Four focus groups were conducted between June and July 2022, with the purpose of gathering rich feedback from different perspectives in Reading. Participants were recruited in collaboration with the Town. One focus group (n=16) was conducted in-person with representatives of Town government (e.g., town management, public safety, public works, RPL); the goal of this group was to learn how the development of a community center or new senior center may impact the Town. Another focus group was conducted in-person with key organizational stakeholders (n=8) that serve Reading residents, such as the food pantry, Mystic Valley Elder Services, local faith communities, and town services (e.g., COA, Recreation). An additional focus group consisting of community leaders and COA volunteers (n=14) was conducted at Town Hall to capture the input of those intimately familiar with the Town and its services. Lastly, a fourth focus group conducted remotely via Zoom included 13 adults who are approaching later life or who are not familiar with the Pleasant Street Center.

Community Survey

A survey for Reading residents aged 18 and older was developed in collaboration with the Reading Center for Active Living Committee and Council on Aging. The survey was made available online through Qualtrics, an online survey platform. A postcard encouraging participation and detailing access points was mailed to every individual resident aged 18 and older (n=20,460), with additional outreach conducted through established Town mechanisms (e.g., COA newsletter, social media, bulletin boards). Residents could participate in one of 3 ways. First, an anonymous link was generated and accessible on the Town of Reading homepage. The mailed postcard also included a QR code, that when scanned by a smart device camera, would bring up the survey webpage. Second, 600 paper copies of the survey were made available for pick up and drop off at Town Hall, the Reading Public Library, and the Pleasant Street Center for those who could not or chose not to participate online. Lastly, residents were encouraged to call the research team at UMass Boston who would go through the survey over the phone. A total of 1,470 responses were recorded, with 11% (n=163) returned as paper copies. This yields approximately a 7% response rate, which is consistent with surveys conducted predominantly online.

Data Analysis

Data collected for the resident survey were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics, including frequencies and cross-tabulations, and are reported in full in **Appendix B** and throughout the results section of this report. Some responses elicited through open-ended questions were extracted and cited verbatim within this report (e.g., "What are your greatest concerns about your ability to continue living in Reading?"). Detailed notes taken during the study's qualitative components (e.g., focus groups, community forums) were reviewed by multiple project staff and used to characterize and categorize the needs of older residents in Reading as they relate to the design and operation of a new senior/community center. We used information from all sources of data to develop recommendations reported in the final section of this report.

Results

Community Forums

Between April and June 2022, 3 community forums were conducted in Reading—two at the Reading Public Library (RPL) and one at the Pleasant Street Center (PSC)—with virtual participation optional. All three forums were well-attended with participants eager to share their thoughts about Reading and the possibilities of a Center for Active Living. Participants were first asked about Reading as a place to grow up and grow old, followed by questions specific to envisioning a Center for Active Living. Common themes are summarized below.

Reading as a place to live

Residents who attended the community forums cited a number of features of the Town that make Reading an ideal place to live. There was a strong sense of “community” among participants, with many citing the close-knit feel of the community and a sense of stability and neighborliness among residents. Reading is close to major highways and to Boston while maintaining a small-town feel, offering a valued balance between city and small-town living. Residents feel safe in Town, citing the Reading Police and Fire Departments as excellent services, including the Town alert system for communicating important information. Reading has many resources already available to the community, such as the Burbank YMCA, the RPL, PSC, and RCTV. The Reading Public School Department not only offers educational and recreational opportunities for school-age children, but also for the community at large through high school sports events, music ensemble concerts, and theater performances.

Some other features of the Town identified as strengths also yielded discussion about opportunities for improvement. For example, while many noted the “close knit” feel of the community as an asset, others countered by noting how difficult it can be for a new resident to get integrated into the community. It can be difficult to find an in-way to connect with other residents and what is happening in Town.

Participants felt like there’s a good amount of social and cultural events in Town (e.g., The Art Walk Downtown, Shop the Block, holiday events), but noted that greater variety and visibility would be ideal. Having a dedicated space for such events would be beneficial (e.g., cultural center, new community center).

Reading is not geographically large or spread out but getting around town was identified as a challenge for many. Although the downtown area was identified as an asset, with shops, restaurants, and Town services being centrally located, getting to downtown can be difficult between traffic and parking availability. For neighborhoods outside of the downtown area, lack of maintained sidewalks and other infrastructure make walkability difficult. Although people can walk around downtown, people cannot easily walk *to* downtown.

Forum participants were glad to have access to public transportation (2 MBTA bus routes, 1 commuter rail stop) and PSC transportation, but noted challenges: not enough transportation options, like door-to-door; not enough flexibility in scheduling and

destinations (e.g., out of town, medical appointments); figuring out routes and schedules can be confusing; getting around without a car can be difficult. Although these services do exist already, greater awareness and access to transportation options is needed.

A primary challenge identified across forums and for residents of all ages was housing and cost of living. Forum participants cited varying lengths of time living in the community and a desire to continue to age in Reading. One barrier to that is the lack of affordable housing, with some citing a need for more subsidized and senior housing. Similarly, forum participants wanted to see more options for senior independent living or opportunities to downsize and remain in the community. The tax rate and overall cost of living was described as high, with concerns of increasing costs pushing individuals and families out of the community.

Envisioning a Reading Center for Active Living

The crux of the forum discussions was centered on envisioning what a Reading Center for Active Living could look like, including thinking through who would participate, what Town Departments could be staffed there, what activities could be offered there, and brainstorming ideas for its location.

Overall, participants supported the notion of an age-inclusive space but noted the importance of maintaining dedicated attention and space for older adults. Participants described existing opportunities for children through the school system, extra-curricular activities, their social networks, and the Burbank YMCA, but noted that the PSC is currently the main source of programs and services for older adults in the community. Older participants were clear that although they do not oppose having a space that incorporates younger ages, they do not want to be forgotten or cast aside in planning and programming. Participants noted that the majority of daytime clientele would be older adults, but with so many seniors continuing to work, it is important to make night and weekend programming available for older adults, not just for children or young adults.

Although most participants emphasized the importance of keeping at least some space and programming age-restricted, many participants discussed some opportunities to engage with children and young adults as important programs to include in a new Center for Active Living. Older participants want the opportunity to socialize with younger residents, through volunteer programs with the schools, or bringing younger people into programs with older adults at a Center for Active Living. Some examples shared included movie nights, storytelling, and informal socializing. Also discussed were opportunities for younger residents to teach older adults new skills and vice versa and opportunities for tutoring or mentoring of younger students with their homework.

In terms of activities, events, and services to be offered by a Center for Active Living, a number of significant provisions were noted by forum participants. The idea that this Center will have to meet a vast variety of needs and interests—even just among the 60+ population—was discussed, with implications that programs and space design will need to

be flexible and adaptable. It is important that social and health services (e.g., application assistance, health clinics, health insurance counselling) continue to be offered. A number of participants described the need for challenging, interesting, and active programs for older adults. There is still a sizeable share of older people who would like to engage in more intense physical activity, like dance or Zumba, and more thought-provoking activities, like enriching courses in cooking, technology, lectures, etc. Food was noted several times as a key feature of a Center for Active Living. Not simply the provision of meals, but participants noted regular/frequent provision of meals with an improved kitchen space as important. The quality of the food was discussed—having high quality nutritious and delicious food is essential to continued meal programs. Programming to target some populations would be helpful, like programing to bring in older men, to bring in both single and coupled adults, and efforts to reach and include immigrant residents. Moreover, participants recognized the need for caregiver support, such as respite or adult day programs, or even childcare for working parents.

Upon discussing programs and activities that would draw people into a Center for Active Living, participants brainstormed the implications on what the space would need to include. An overarching idea about the space was that it needs to be accessible and inclusive in both structure and culture. Residents with mobility or cognitive impairment should be able to get around the Center easily and feel welcomed and respected. Most agreed that a Center for Active Living needs to be flexible to adapt to a wide range of current and future planning efforts. It should have space that is multipurpose (e.g., moving walls for division, large and open to serve many needs) and space for informal socializing—there is no current space at the PSC where residents can drop-in and relax with peers. Capacity to offer multiple programs at the same time was preferred by many.

In addition to flexibility, a few key features most emphasized among residents included: adequate parking, and/or improved transportation options to get there; accessible egress, hallways, and rooms; dedicated space for art classes; equipment and space for physical activity; and private space for one-on-one appointments. Other important space features that came up included comfortable and accessible furniture (e.g., chairs with armrests for ease getting up and down), employment opportunities for older adults, and low to no cost programs and services.

When asked to consider where a Center for Active Living could be located in Reading, participants offered a few possible locations around Town. Many participants noted that the current PSC building is still a loved asset of the community, though it no longer serves effectively as a senior center. While some asked about opportunities to renovate and expand the current space, most participants agreed that a new location would be best for a new Center. Participants liked that the current PSC is located downtown and would like to see a new Center located downtown, but challenges associated with the downtown area—lack of parking, already densely developed—exist. An empty Walgreens building and space near the Reading Depot were discussed as opportunities close to downtown.

Near schools (e.g., Birch Meadow area) was suggested by some, noting opportunities to be on a ‘campus’ model with other town assets and proximity to schools for volunteer and engagement opportunities. Some noted cons included congestion in the area at school drop-off and pick-up times and being removed from the downtown area. Participants would be open to a location outside of downtown but having adequate transportation would need to be in place to access the Center. Other spaces discussed were near the Market Basket—in a plaza with other shops and restaurants—Oakland Road, or Symonds Way.

Realizing a Center for Active Living

Many forum participants were eager to discuss the potential of a new senior community center space but were aware of potential barriers to development. These focused on (1) addressing immediate need, (2) transparency and communication, (3) clarity on the center’s role, and (4) managing other priorities.

The interim period

Opportunities for short-term adaptations were discussed to expand the programs and services offered until a new space could be developed. Forum participants asked about using meeting spaces in the library for programs, especially since the RPL has undergone a renovation and has better temperature control, technology, and accessibility than the PSC². Others discussed the possibility of having satellite locations through Town for programming, so that residents across town may have greater access compared to getting downtown. Continuing or expanding virtual programming was considered to be an inclusive and effective way to keep residents engaged.

Transparency and communication about the process

A common theme that ran through all three forums was the need for clearer and more consistent communication between the Town and its residents. On some occasions, forum participants brought up a need for a program and then were quickly informed by other participants that it was already available either through the Town, the Burbank YMCA, or another local organization.

Clarify the role in the community

Some participants found it difficult to envision a Center for Active Living without knowing the full range of what is already available in the community. In the same vein, participants at every forum identified the need to recognize and inventory the resources and opportunities presently available to residents before continuing with planning efforts. Participants agreed that efforts to improve communication and coordination of existing resources was crucial for all residents of Reading. Examples included coordination with the Burbank YMCA for programs and use of their space and pool and tighter connection with the Public Library and all that they offer.

² In October 2022, a pilot program—Wellness Wednesdays—was launched, hosting programming for older adults at the Reading Public Library ([October-2022-Pleasantries-Newsletter-PDF \(readingma.gov\)](#)).

Managing other priorities

Additionally, other Town planning processes were brought up as possibly competing interests with the ReCal project. Forum participants made it clear that this effort to develop a Reading Center for Active Living is a priority and should be considered as such. Other planning projects or Town space assessments should be conducted after the ReCal committee can finalize their recommendations for moving forward with a new Center. Residents agreed that the process of engaging the community is crucial to the efficacy of planning projects as large as this one.

Findings from Focus Groups

A total of 54 people participated in one of four focus groups that were conducted in support of this project. Representatives from Town Departments, community organizations, and residents of a variety of ages participated in a group conversation that lasted between 60-90 minutes. Three focus groups were conducted in-person at various locations in Reading and one was conducted remotely via Zoom video conference. A notetaker was present at each focus group. Themes were derived from these notes and are reported below.

Strengths and Challenges Living in Reading

Reading is described as a safe and generous community, full of residents willing to give their time to volunteer, and organizations working together to support residents. Its proximity to Boston, and all that it offers—including healthcare and arts, as well as its greenspaces and walkability—were named as features valued by many focus group participants. As well, existing community assets such as the Reading Public Library, the Pleasant Street Center, the Reading Public School Department, and the Burbank YMCA form a network of programs and services that enhance quality of life for many in Town.

Things that make it challenging to live, and age, in Reading were identified as being the rising cost of property taxes and other essential costs of living (e.g., utilities, food, gas etc.) and the availability of housing options for those wishing to downsize from their large single-family homes. Access to housing that is affordable to those in middle-income brackets is needed as well as the opportunity to access housing with features like transportation, meals, or access to other in-home supports that can enable a person to remain living independently are most preferred, according to focus group participants. Those caring for a person with disabilities, or an aging family member face levels of stress that can be overwhelming and can make navigating the systems of care difficult as they support their care partner through the life course. Another challenge identified by focus group participants is the prevalence of mental health conditions and a general lack of available and accessible supports and services.

Another challenge that was identified across focus groups is the lack of transportation for those who no longer drive or those who would prefer to reduce their driving. Currently, the Pleasant Street Center coordinates transportation, with medical transportation provided by a vendor, and there are limited public transportation options. Despite the small geography of Reading, walkability is spotty. Some areas near downtown have networks of sidewalks that enable residents to get around; but many parts of the community are not as well

connected via sidewalks. This is problematic, especially in winter months, for those wishing to walk as a means of activity or mobility. Traffic in Reading has also created a barrier for residents who drive, as many choose to drive only during certain times of day to avoid congestion. One implication of these transportation barriers is that some residents, particularly those who don't drive or live with mobility limitations, do not participate in the community as much as they'd like, which can lead to social isolation—which is known for its negative physical and mental health side-effects.

Finally, a common theme raised by focus group participants was eloquently described by one participant as a “lack of a ‘third space’”—space that is not home nor work where people can engage in meaningful activity and be in community with others. The Reading Public Library has two community meeting spaces that can be reserved for programs or meetings; but it lacks space for dropping in or gathering in groups socially. The Burbank YMCA is a great resource for physical activity; but there is a cost associated with these programs that can be prohibitive. There is also a common understanding that the Pleasant Street Center has been operating at its maximum capacity for several years and has serious limitations in its ability to host large groups of older adults for any single program (e.g., limited parking, no bathroom on the entry-level), few program rooms that limit the ability to host programs simultaneously and limited private counseling space to provide services to residents.

Taken together, these challenges highlight necessary considerations for the Town of Reading to take as they continue planning for the future.

Envisioning a Center for Active Living

Considerations of new space were offered and have been organized into four dimensions of a potential new space: the physical design of the building to support resident wellness, the importance of accessibility elements that will ensure that all are welcome, and programming and branding that will entice residents to engage in new ways.

Among Town staff, the consideration of a new multigenerational community center has multiple benefits across departments. For example, new space could serve as a heating/cooling shelter during extreme weather events, and overall function as a place for large community events to be held that would fill a need of the community. As well, a new multigenerational center could offer a centralized place for Town departments to “meet a lot more faces” and really widen the front door of municipal services. For example, one participant suggested that things like compost stickers could be sold at a future center; many others noted that they could communicate their activities and resources through a new center as a way of reaching new and more residents than the current Pleasant Street Center accommodates. General sentiments about the need for universal design and space that can serve multiple purposes was clearly communicated by focus group participants.

Designed to Promote Resident Wellness

As well, several suggestions made by focus group participants focused on how the physical space can be organized to promote the holistic wellness that Reading residents of all ages

are working towards. Outdoor seating, shade, walking paths, and gardens were acknowledged as a valuable aspect of community space and can serve as an outward facing amenity that could attract passersby to participate.

On the inside of the building, having specific types of space would ensure that programming could be delivered on a number of topics that are important to middle and older aged residents. For example, quiet and tranquil space for practices like yoga, meditation, reiki, tai-chi, and qigong was mentioned as a space type that would accommodate the preferences of Reading residents.

Professional and personal development are also key goals for those aging in Reading, according to focus group participants. Space that can accommodate educational programs—including presentation capabilities, sinks and storage for art supplies, and adequate seating for students to engage—is of high value to residents. As well, working space for those in the workforce or who mentor was mentioned as filling a gap in the community, as the RPL doesn't have sufficient quiet work or study spaces for individuals or small groups.

Finally, access to healthy food is an aspect of the potential new center that was identified as a need by focus group participants. The food pantry is currently operated out of a local church and there were suggestions that bringing this valuable resource into a more neutral public space could increase the uptake of such services. The opportunity to share meals with others was also noted as a highly valuable contribution of this potential new space. Having a commercial kitchen that could prepare meals on-site would allow not only for congregate meals to happen regularly but could also be used to host community-wide events, potentially offer opportunities for renting the space out and generating revenue, offering cooking classes or demonstrations, offering casual “drop in” café style space that many noted would be valued for those who cannot access local restaurants and cafes because of cost, physical accessibility, and dietary need.

Accessibility

The need for “drop-in” space where residents can socialize and get out of the house was mentioned not only as a preference but also as a dimension of accessibility to the offerings of the Town. Not all residents feel comfortable or confident in attending formal programs alone or without prior experience. Thus, this informal drop-in space would offer an opportunity for those residents who may not want to participate in programming to engage in the community. Suggestions for a rotating public art gallery in this space were offered as an idea.

Rising costs of living can mean that residents need to work longer to maintain their standard of living; but also, residents may be actively providing childcare or eldercare to family members or friends during the work hours. Consequently, having communal space that is open in the evenings and on weekends would further ensure access to all. As well, opportunities for intergenerational and multigenerational activities outside of school hours is valued by focus group participants.

While no strong preference for the physical location of a new center was clear among focus group participants, it was noted that access would hinge on either the production of sufficient parking at a new facility or the investment in local transportation that would accommodate residents. For example, designating a parking lot far away from a downtown area and providing a regularly scheduled shuttle service that would get residents, including those with mobility impairments, to and from the center safely and on schedule with programs, meals, and appointments.

A final element of accessibility that was raised by focus group participants relates to the costs associated with a new facility. Both the financing costs that would impact residents tax bill but also the extent to which the sustainability of the facility included program or service fees that would fall to the consumer. There was resounding agreement that the financial security of older residents of Reading is the number one concern; and if a new facility was intended to provide equitable access, costs associated with participation would need to be small or could be subsidized in some way.

Programming

As far as the activities that would take place at a potential multigenerational center, focus group participants emphasized multiple forms of exercise—classes, equipment, outdoor, strength training, flexibility/mobility training etc. Additionally, trips both local and nonlocal would be attractive to residents of a variety of ages. Lifelong learning programs—beyond a one-time event—are desired, as well as to the arts, including singing, acting, dancing, are appealing. Intergenerational opportunities were welcomed by many focus group participants, with an emphasis on having these things available but not forced. Volunteer opportunities were identified as something that would provide purpose and meaning to resident’s lives; but that in order to develop meaningful volunteer opportunities, investments must be made by staff. Finally, it was understood that programmatic ideas could be generated by residents and would also offer a valuable way for residents to share their skills, talents, and experiences.

Branding

A final element of focus group discussions had to do with the extent to which residents would participate in a multigenerational community center. Participants acknowledged that many older residents of Reading do not participate at the Pleasant Street Center because they don’t feel old enough or have enough “need” to attend. It was clear that the messaging and branding of such a new place would require thoughtful investment in the building's name, its mission or the missions of the entities housed there. Whether the name becomes the Center for Active Living (CAL), it was clear that a new name that allows residents from all walks of life “see themselves” or identify with the place is necessary to its success. As well, changing the narrative that you must demonstrate a “need” to take advantage of Town services may require an investment in public awareness, communication, and the creation of more shared spaces in Reading a way for the Town to fully realize the impact of its investment in a new multigenerational community center.

Results from Community Survey

In this section, we report key findings from each section of the survey. Tables illustrating results in detail are included in **Appendix B**.

Respondent Characteristics

A postcard invitation to participate with instructions for accessing the survey was mailed to every Reading resident aged 18 or older as of September 1, 2022. Respondents to the community survey included 1,470 adult residents, representing a 7% response rate (**Table 1**). This response rate is expected for a survey conducted predominantly online. Compared to the age distribution of all adult Reading residents, survey response rates were higher among those age 60 and older (see **Table 1**). Given the small number of respondents age 18-29, results will be reported for age groups 18-49, 50-59, 60-69, 70-79, and 80+. Response distributions by age group are shown for all survey questions in **Appendix B**.

Table 1. Community Survey Respondents

	Reading town census, residents age 18+, postcards mailed	Age distribution (%), town census	Number of responses	Response rate by age	Age distribution (%), survey responses
Age 18-29	3,597	18%	18	<1%	1%
Age 30-49	6,427	32%	267	4%	18%
Age 50-59	3,547	17%	212	6%	15%
Age 60-69	3,283	16%	342	10%	23%
Age 70-79	2,304	11%	329	14%	22%
Age 80+	1,302	6%	125	10%	9%
Age not provided	---	---	177	---	12%
All ages	20,460	100%	1,470	7%	100%

Nearly two-thirds of the sample identified as female and 37% identified as male³ (**Appendix B**). About 40% of the sample is working full-time, with over half of those under age 60 reporting full-time work (**Figure 1**). More than half of those age 60-69 are still working either full- or part-time, as well as a small share of those age 70-79, indicating either a need or desire to remain in the workforce. About 4% of respondents selected “other,” as their employment status, with write-in responses including stay at home caregiver, student, currently unemployed, and limited, seasonal, or per diem employment (**Appendix B**).

³ A small number of respondents selected “Other” as their gender identity, totaling less than 1% of the sample.

Figure 1. What is your employment status?

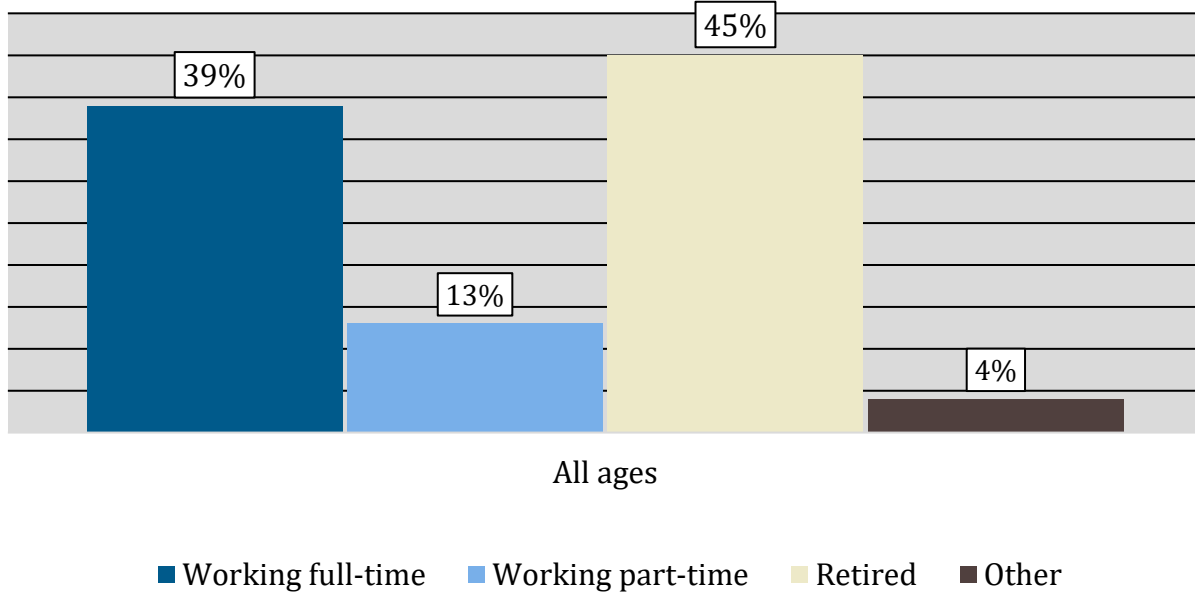
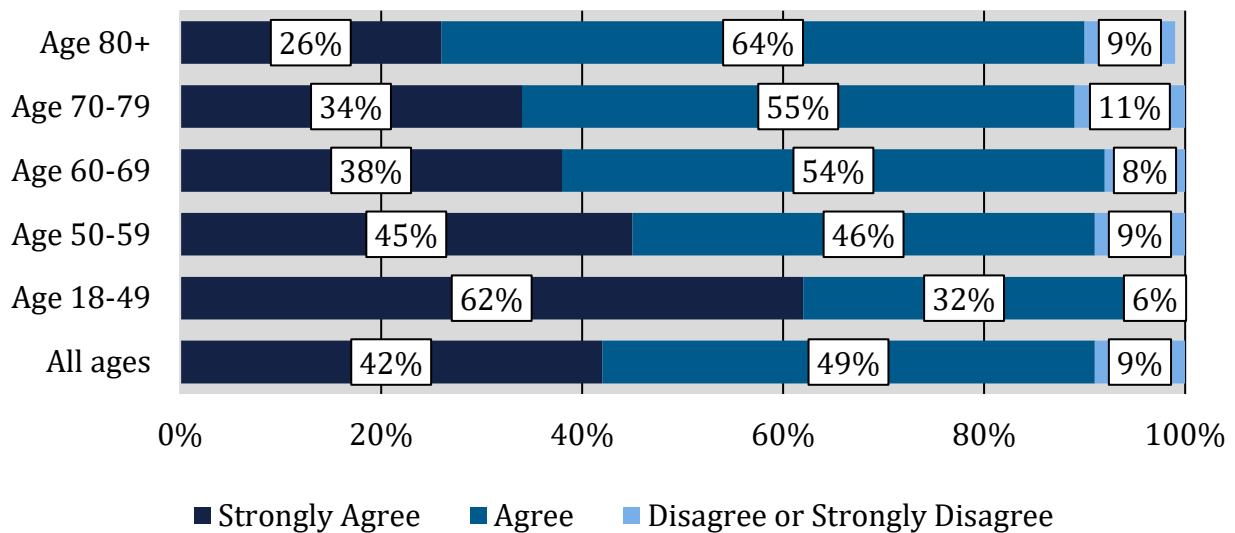


Figure 2. "I have adequate resources to meet my financial needs, including home maintenance, personal healthcare, and other expenses"



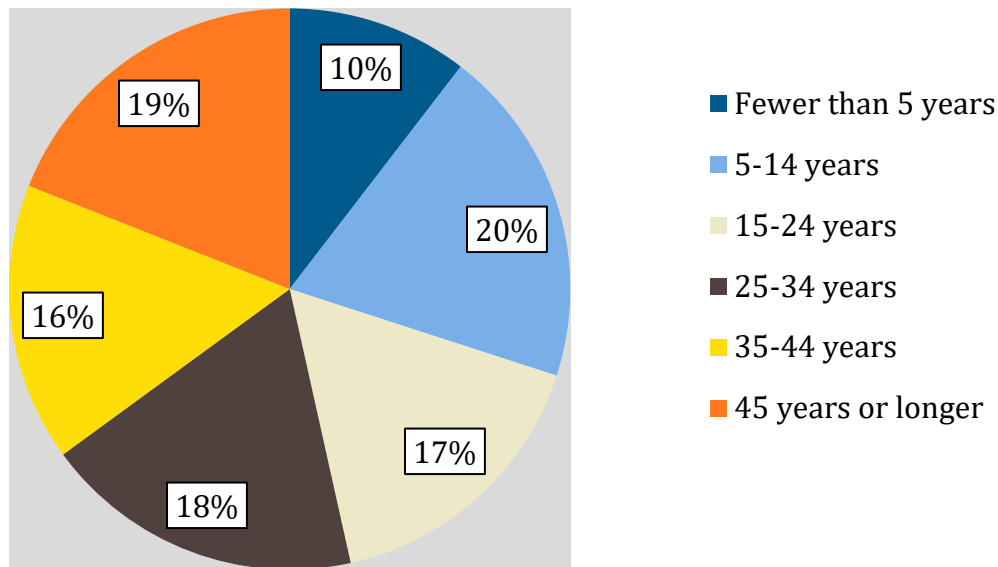
The vast majority of respondents agree that they have adequate resources to meet their financial needs, though the strength of agreement decreases with age. In **Figure 2**, 62% of those age 18-49 selected “Strongly Agree,” compared to 45% of those age 50-59, 38% of those age 60-69, and 34% of those age 70-79; a quarter of respondents age 80 or older selected “strongly agree.” Although most respondents report having adequate resources, there is a share of residents—largely older residents—who may be at risk of financial insecurity.

Community and Neighborhood

A commonly expressed goal of older adults is to remain living in their own homes for as long as possible. Aging in place implies remaining in familiar home and community settings, with supports as needed, as opposed to moving to institutional settings, such as nursing homes. By aging in place, older adults can retain their independence, as well as maintain valued social relationships and engagement with the community.

Survey respondents included lifelong residents as well as relative newcomers (**Figure 3**). Indeed, a near even distribution of responses to duration of time living in Reading emerged, with 35% of respondents having lived in Reading for 35 or more years, 35% living in Reading for 15-34 years, and 30% living in Reading for fewer than 14 years. These results suggest a diverse population in terms of experience living in the Town of Reading which can provide a robust set of perspectives.

Figure 3. How long have you lived in the Town of Reading?



Nearly half of respondents reported that continuing to live in Reading is “very important” as they get older (**Figure 4**). Another 35% reported “slightly important,” and just 7% suggested remaining in Reading is “not at all important.” When compared by age group, stark differences emerge. About 3 out of 4 residents age 80+ reported remaining in Reading is very important, compared to half of residents age 50-59, and 22% of residents age 18-49. In contrast, 62% of younger residents (age 18-49) reported remaining in Reading is somewhat or slightly important, which is nearly twice the share of those aged 70-79 and 80+. In essence, those who are reaching old age in Reading are committed to staying.

Figure 4. How important is it to you to remain living in Reading as you get older?

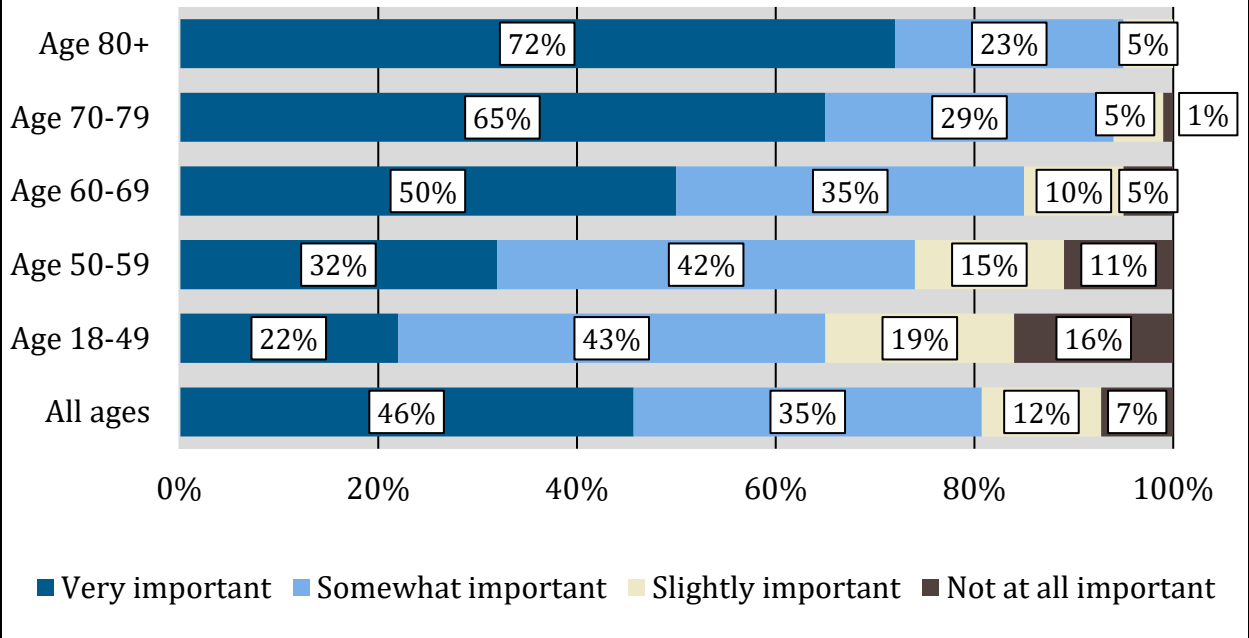
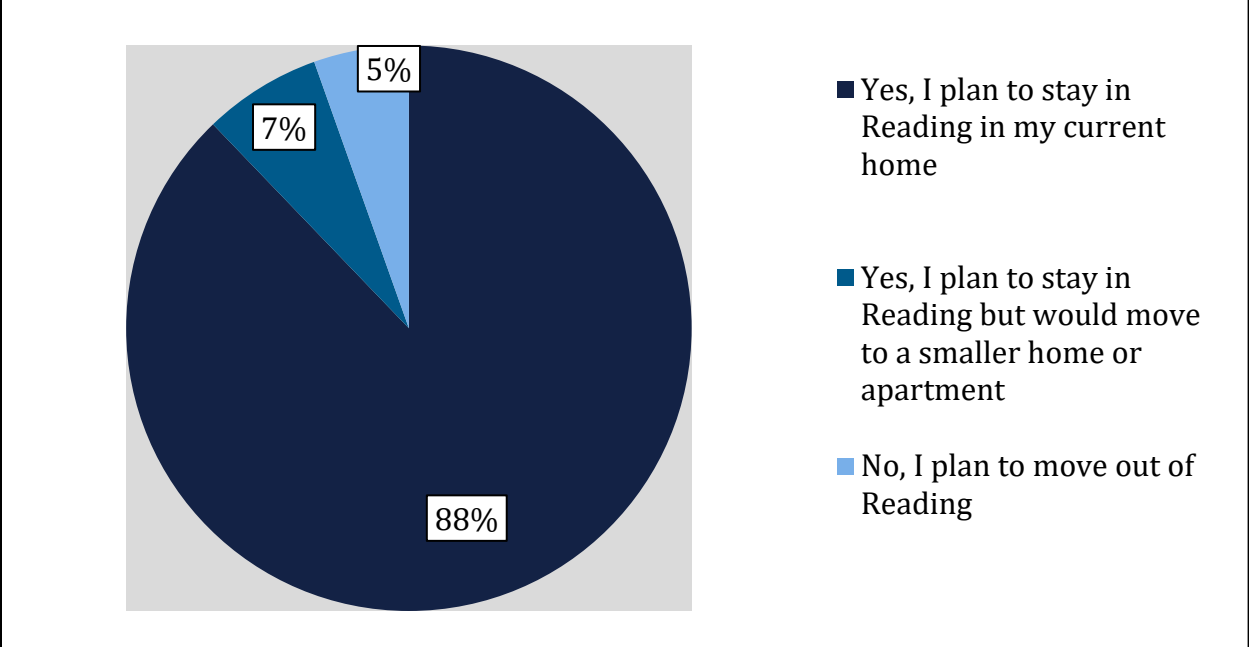


Figure 5. Do you plan to stay in Reading for the next 5 years or more?



When it comes to plans for staying in Reading, most respondents intend to stay, either in their current home or to move to a smaller home or apartment. **Figure 5** demonstrates that 88% of respondents plan to stay in their current home, and a small share (7%) aim to remain in Town but would downsize their living arrangement. These results are consistent when compared by age group (**Appendix B**), suggesting that residents of all ages plan to stay in Reading for the foreseeable future.

Survey participants were asked to share their greatest concerns about their ability to continue living in Reading through an open-ended question. Most respondents (1,234; 84%) provided a written response. **Table 2** presents common themes that emerged, with demonstrative verbatim quotes. Half of the written responses reported cost of living being a challenge, with many concerned about being able to continue to afford to live in Reading. A quarter of respondents who wrote in identified concerns about getting around town. These included notes about the quality of roads and sidewalks, road congestion and availability of parking, and concerns about availability of alternative modes of transportation. Nearly 20% identified access to resources to maintain wellbeing and independence as a top concern as they age. Comments included needing access to basic needs and amenities, such as grocery stores, healthcare services, and home maintenance supports (e.g., yardwork, shoveling, small repairs). Also included were comments about remaining socially and intellectually engaged with the community, citing the need for opportunities to engage with others through activities, classes, and events.

Table 2. Sample responses to the question, “What are your greatest concerns about your ability to continue living in Reading as you get older?”

Affordability and Cost of Living
“Concerned that we will be priced out of Reading with increased taxes, electric and water bills.”
“It keeps getting more expensive, I’m afraid in a year we won’t be able to live here.”
Transportation and Getting Around Town
“If/when I lose the ability to drive. How will I get around in my community. How will I be able to get to a store, visit friends, attend medical appointments.”
“The public transportation to resources is poor...Even as an able bodied person with a car, I wish this resource existed.”
“I am concerned that the roads and sidewalks in town do not get repaired often or quickly when showing disrepair.”
Having the resources to maintain health, independence, and social engagement
“Having support from the community in order to stay in my home. I wish there was a group which aided in handyman projects, medical transportation, and more social activities.”
“Having a place to gather with people my age. During the pandemic, isolation was of great concern. Having activities with people of my age group is very important for mental health.”

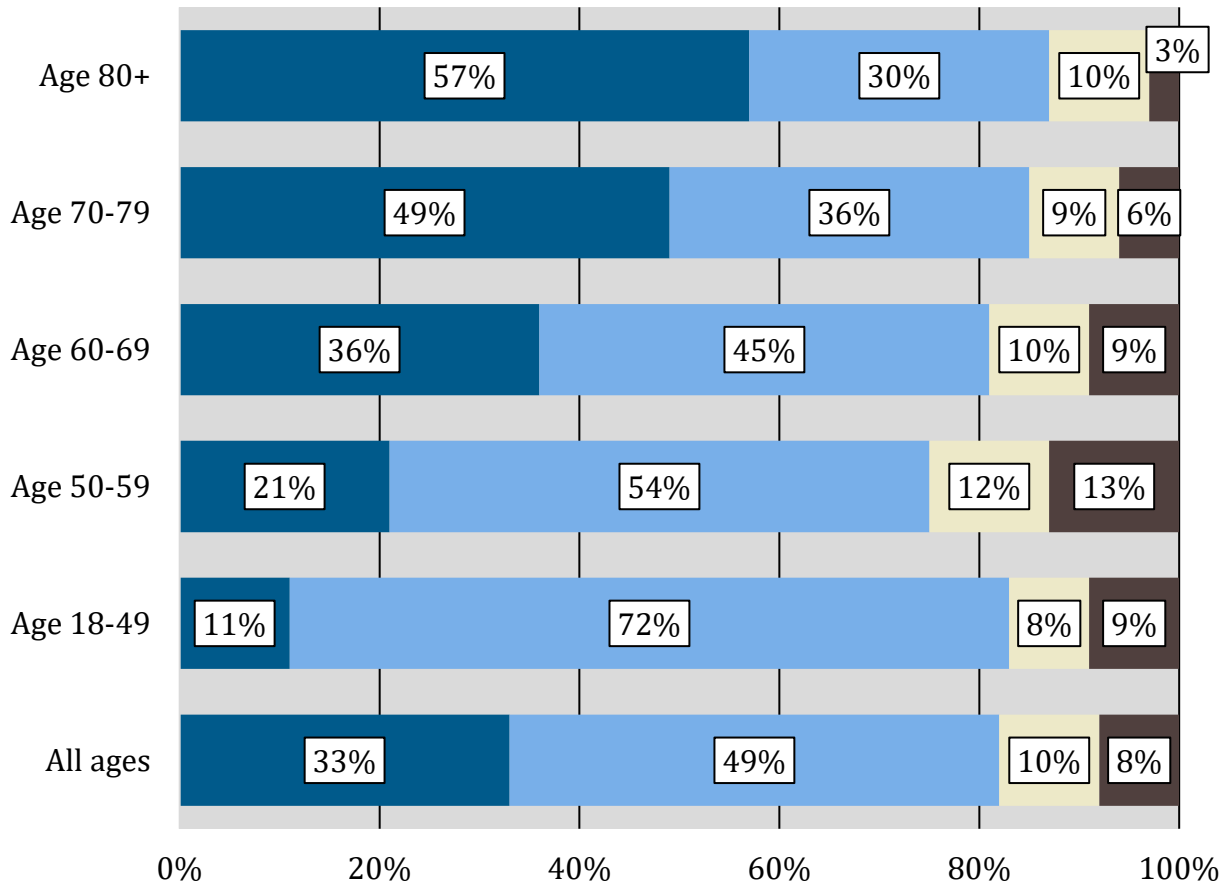
Future Senior Center/Community Center

Senior centers serve as community focal points for older adults, offering a variety of programs and services designed to meet the needs and interests of the local community. Enveloping senior services into an all-ages community center may have organizational benefits (e.g., more diverse funding streams), participation benefits (e.g., attracting new residents), and community benefits (e.g., streamlined access to human services and erosion of ageist stereotypes), but core services for older adults remain essential (Pardasani & Thompson, 2012). Nonetheless, feedback from community stakeholders is crucial to planning and development related to community and senior services.

When asked about preference for a new senior or community center, about half of survey respondents preferred an all-ages community center, though responses vary considerably by age group (**Figure 6**). About 72% of younger respondents (age 18-49) reported preference for a community center, and a small share (11%) preferred a senior center. As age increases, as does the share of residents who prefer a senior center, increasing to nearly half of respondents age 70-79 and 57% of respondents age 80+. Consistent across age groups, a small share (10%) reported no preference. Over 100 respondents selected “Other” and wrote-in their preference. Among write-in responses, most reported that they do not perceive a need for a new senior or community center, citing sufficient existing opportunities, concerns about town development, and financial implications.

Survey respondents were provided the space to expand upon their selection with an open-ended question; about half of all respondents wrote in a response. **Table 3** shares the common themes that emerged, as well as verbatim quotes that illustrate each theme. A quarter of written responses identified important attributes of a center, including parking, variety of programming, adaptable space, and having some age-segregated space and programs. Among write-ins, 21% suggested that a community center could serve as an opportunity for community cohesion and inclusion. Responses centered on the idea of bringing residents together from all backgrounds and generations to share experiences, knowledge, and skills. Nearly 1 in 5 written responses expressed resistance to a new building or development. These included concerns about how development costs will influence their own expenses (e.g., increased tax bill) as well as perceptions that there are other priorities for town funding (e.g., improving school facilities, addressing road and sidewalk repairs). Those expressing resistance to a new development also reported the perception that adequate existing resources in town that can be rehabbed or repurposed.

Figure 6. Most preferred scenario, by age

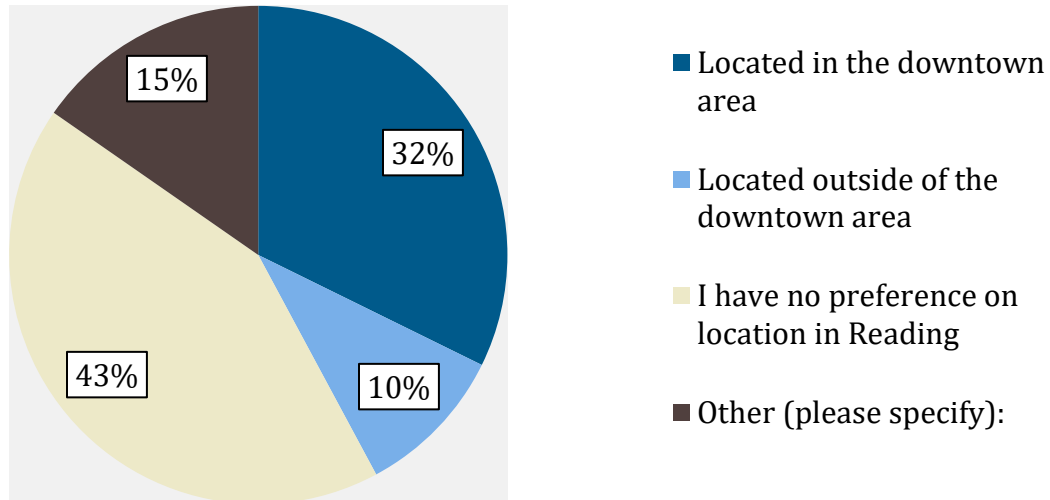


- A Senior Center for residents age 60+
- An all-ages Community Center including designated space and programming for residents age 60+
- I have no preference
- Other (please specify):

Table 3. Sample responses to the question, “please tell us more about your preference for a new senior center or community center.”

A Community Center as an opportunity for community cohesion and inclusion
“I would like a community center that all citizens can access and multi-generational activities could be hosted, including youth and individuals with disabilities.”
“Done well, an all-ages Community Center can help keep ties between generations strong, which is good for all. I'd love to see Reading taking care of our seniors while providing opportunities for positive interactions with the broader community.”
Important attributes
Maintaining space and programs for older residents
“If the town is considering a facility that offers services to those other than seniors, I think it a great idea to... make it a vibrant and exciting facility for all, provided seniors are not pushed out or cast aside in the process. The facility should be built for, around and in support of our senior population.”
“Since seniors have more time during the day, I believe that the space should be designed with them in mind - activities, accessibility, interests and needs, etc. However, if the town is investing in this building, some of the gathering spaces should be available to the community at times and on days where it is not otherwise in planned use.”
Adaptable and variety of features
“Center must be set up for the physically challenged, not just for wheelchair accessibility, but for those with limited walking/standing capacity...railings...elevators...automatic door openers...bathroom access...hallway/room setup width for wheelchair bound citizens...sound proofing if children are to be a part...flooring important-nothing slippery... communal space so both young and old can associate together...”
“A new center should have considerable configurable space for events or community meetings. It should also have smaller, dedicated rooms for small events and lockable storage for clubs or similar groups. It should have hanging-out space like a lobby. It should have kitchen facilities -- also maybe a short order service. It should have good wifi and computer facilities with printers, copiers, and office equipment that people may not have at home.”
Resistance to new development
“I think a new senior center would be duplicative to existing options already available to seniors. Would prefer to see the money spent elsewhere.”
“I don't really want a new senior center (see taxing-out senior residents on prior question) but if we aren't able to remodel the current one to fit needs, we should build/rent space for all community members with programming for all.”

Figure 7. Location preference for a future senior/community center

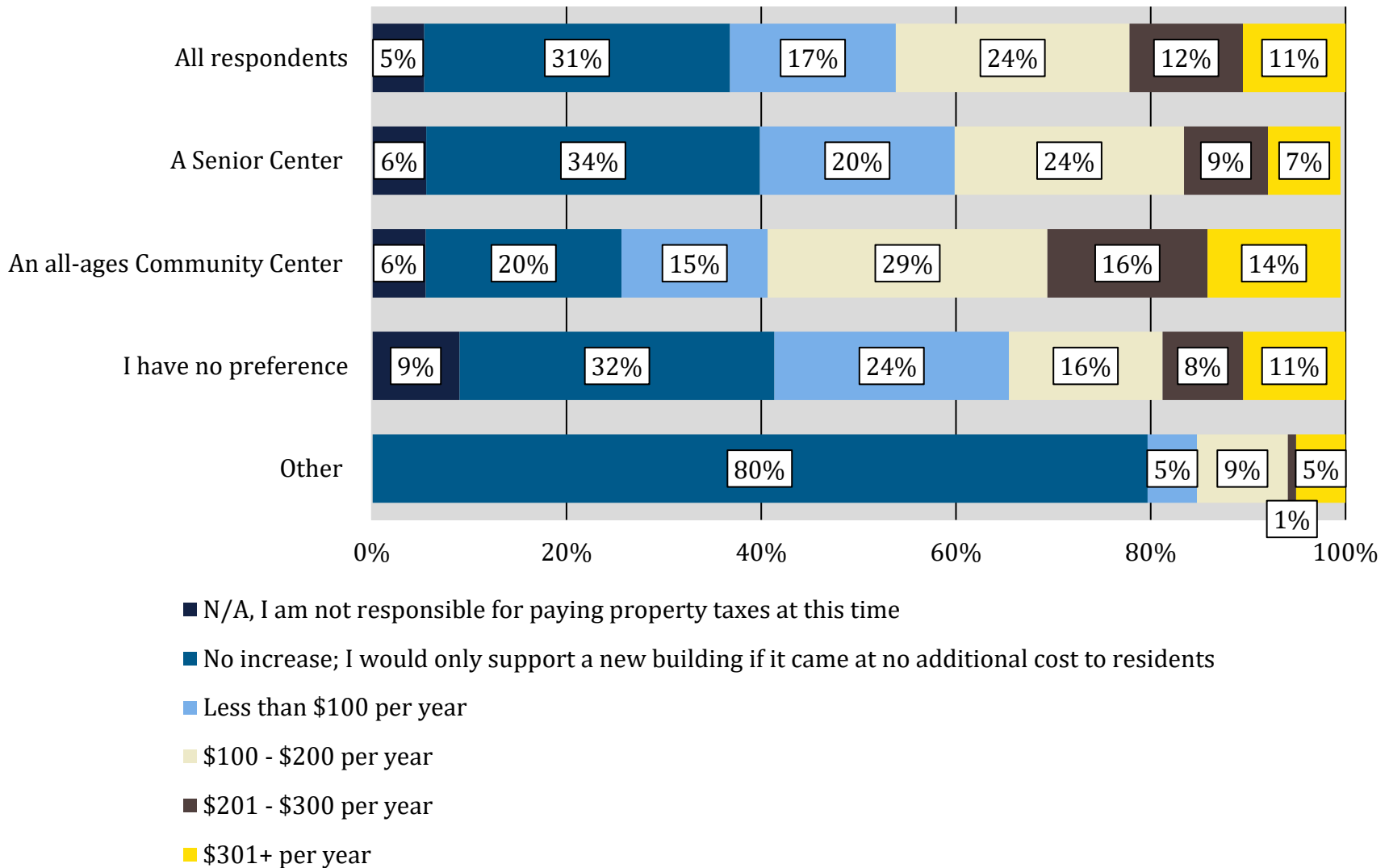


Nearly half of respondent had no preference for location of a new senior or community center (**Figure 7**). About a third prefer having a space near downtown Reading, close to shops, restaurants, Town Hall, and other amenities. A small share (10%) prefers a space outside of the downtown area. Among the 15% who selected “Other” as their preference, responses centered around being able to access the space, such as need for parking and physical accessibility, and being close to other amenities, not necessarily in the immediate downtown district. A quarter of respondents who select “other” for location preference wrote in that they do not want a new senior or community center.

Given that the development of a new senior or community center in Reading would impact Town expenditures, gathering feedback from residents about potential tax burden was an important item to include on this survey. **Figure 8** presents results, broken down by space preference, to the question: “For FY22, the average tax bill was \$9,313. If it meant an increase to your household taxes during a set period of time, please indicate the maximum amount you might support for a new senior center or community center.” Regardless of preference, most respondents would be willing to accommodate modest increases in taxes to gain a new gathering space in Reading. About 41% would support an increase of less than \$200. Nearly a quarter of respondents would support an increase to their household tax bill of \$200 or more. A small share of respondents reported not being responsible for household taxes (e.g., renters).

For those who prefer a senior center, 60% would be willing to pay an additional \$100 or more annually; and for those who prefer a community center, 74% would be willing to pay at least \$100 or more, annually. Most of those who selected “other” as their preference for reported they would only support a new development if it came at no cost, which aligns with the reasons given for selecting other (e.g., do not need a new center). Results suggest that residents may be more willing to pay for an all-ages community center compared to a senior center, but individual cost burden should be limited.

Figure 8. Maximum household tax increase supported, by senior or community center preference



Survey respondents were asked to prioritize the types of spaces as part of a new senior or community center⁴. The following tables present the most frequently selected types of spaces, with the range of top selected choices among each age group reported in parentheses.

Table 4 displays the top 5 most frequently selected indoor spaces, by age. Descriptive statistics for the complete set of response options by age is presented in **Appendix B**. Across age groups, multipurpose space for independent, small group, and large group activities were most selected as priority. Among residents age 60 and older, access to food was ranked highly, with almost half of respondents age 60-79 selecting café or dining space, and more than 50% of respondents age 80+ selecting kitchen and dining space.”

Table 4. Top ranked indoor spaces, by age

	All ages	Age 18-49	Age 50-59	Age 60-69	Age 70-79	Age 80+
Multipurpose space for small group activities (e.g., book club, meetings, card games)	1 (68%)	1 (68%)	1 (67%)	1 (67%)	1 (69%)	1 (69%)
Indoor exercise space for classes (e.g., yoga, Zumba, Pilates)	2	2	2	2	2	3
Multipurpose space for large group activities (e.g., concerts, lectures, parties)	3	5 (42%)	3	3	3	4
Café or “drop in” food space	4		5 (47%)	4	5 (46%)	
Kitchen and dining space	5 (43%)			5 (42%)	4	2
Dedicated arts and crafts space (e.g., painting, fiber arts, pottery equipment)		4	4			
Space for games (e.g., mah-jongg, bridge, chess) and billiards		3				
Lobby or lounge space for informal socializing						5 (50%)

Similarly, respondents were asked to prioritize types of outdoor space that they would like to see in a new senior or community center (**Table 5**). Benches or comfortable outdoor seating and picnic tables/outdoor dining space were the top selections across age groups, with more than half of respondents selecting each. Survey respondents identified outdoor spaces to relax, socialize, and engage in light activity as top priorities. Descriptive statistics for the complete set of response options by age is presented in **Appendix B**.

⁴ Full tabulations for Tables 4-6 are presented in **Appendix B**.

Following types of space, respondents were asked to prioritize accessibility features to be considered in a new senior or community center (**Table 6**). Descriptive statistics for the complete set of response options by age is presented in **Appendix B**. The top two selections were little to no cost for participation and ample parking, though residents age 18-49 less frequently identified parking as a priority compared to older age groups. Having enough space to run multiple programs at once was selected frequently across age groups. Programming for all ages was a top priority among residents age 18-49, whereas dedicated space was a top selection among respondents age 60 and older. Taken together, residents of all ages and abilities need to be able to get to the center and have sufficient choices about when they go and what programs they can attend.

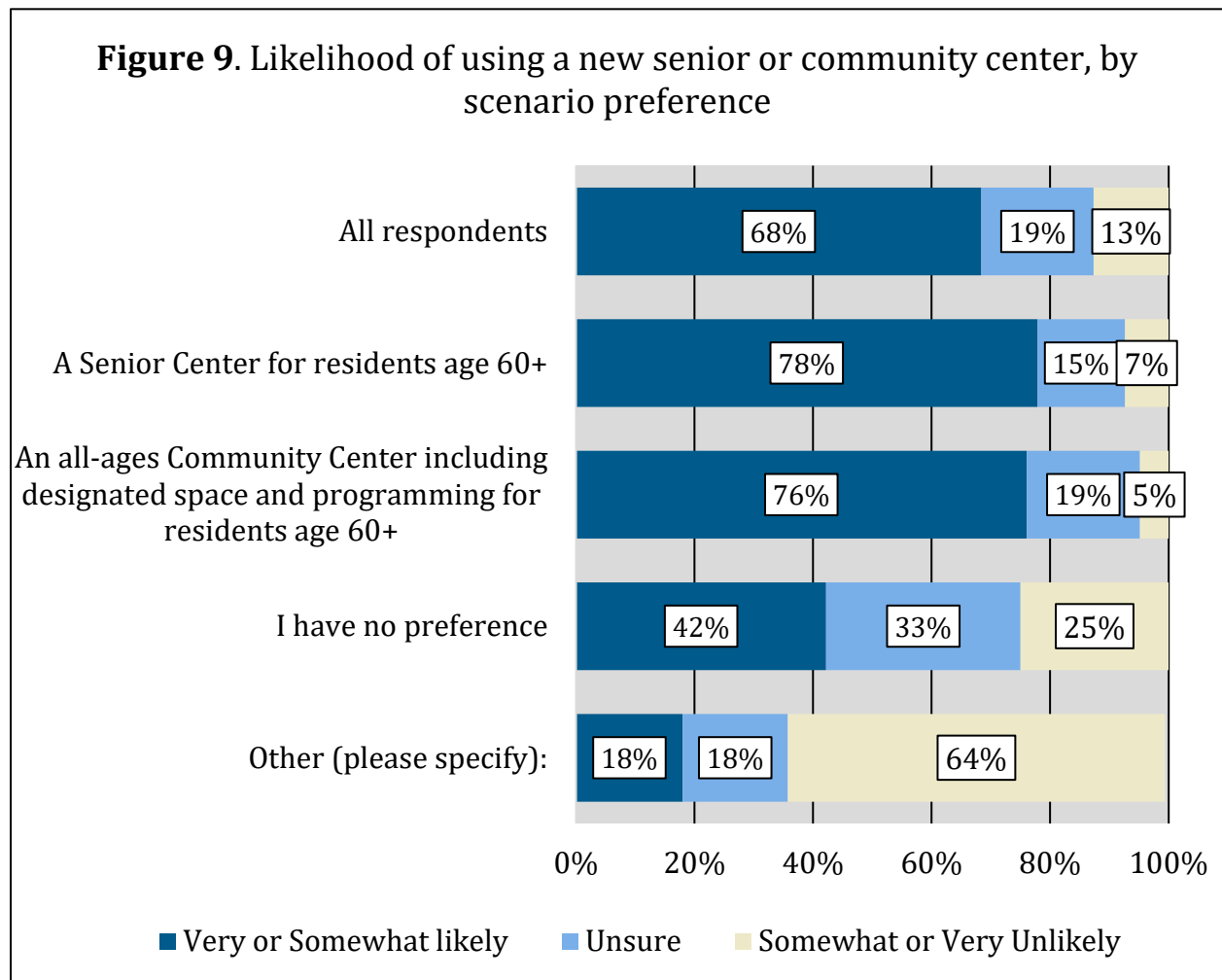
Table 5. Top ranked outdoor spaces, by age

	All ages	Age 18-49	Age 50-59	Age 60-69	Age 70-79	Age 80+
Benches or comfortable outdoor seating	1 (69%)	2	1 (68%)	1 (73%)	1 (77%)	1 (80%)
Picnic tables/outdoor dining space	2	1 (62%)	2	2	2	2
Grass area for lawn games (e.g., bocce, cornhole, croquet)	3	3	3	3	4	4
Gardening area	4	4	4	4	5 (31%)	5 (24%)
Walking/running track	5 (34%)		5 (30%)	5 (34%)	3	3
Splash pad		5 (33%)				

Table 6. Top ranked accessibility features, by age

	All ages	Age 18-49	Age 50-59	Age 60-69	Age 70-79	Age 80+
No or little cost to participate in programs	1 (66%)	1 (63%)	1 (62%)	1 (68%)	2	2
Ample parking	2	5 (48%)	2	2	1 (78%)	1 (81%)
The facility being open in the evenings and on weekends	3	2	3	3		
Enough space for multiple programs to be running simultaneously	4	4	4	5 (46%)	3	5 (42%)
Door to door transportation to and from the new center	5 (47%)		5 (49%)	4	4	3
Programming that integrated residents of all ages		3				
Dedicated space for older residents					5 (48%)	4

When asked, “if a new senior or community center was developed, how likely would you or members of your household be to use the facility?” the response was largely positive, with 68% responding with very or somewhat likely (**Figure 9**). Respondents who preferred the senior center for residents age 60+ scenario responded similarly on this question as those who preferred the all-ages community center including designated space and programming for residents age 60+⁵. Among those who reported no preference for facility type, 42% reported it likely that they or members of their household would use a new facility. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of respondents who selected “other” as facility preference also reported low likelihood of attending a new senior or community center, which aligns with the reasons given for selecting Other (i.e., no need for new development). Those who previously reported no preference for a new senior or community center also reported higher shares of uncertainty and unlikelihood of attending a new facility, suggesting that there are community members who may not care, may not know enough, or may have concerns regarding a new senior or community center in Town.



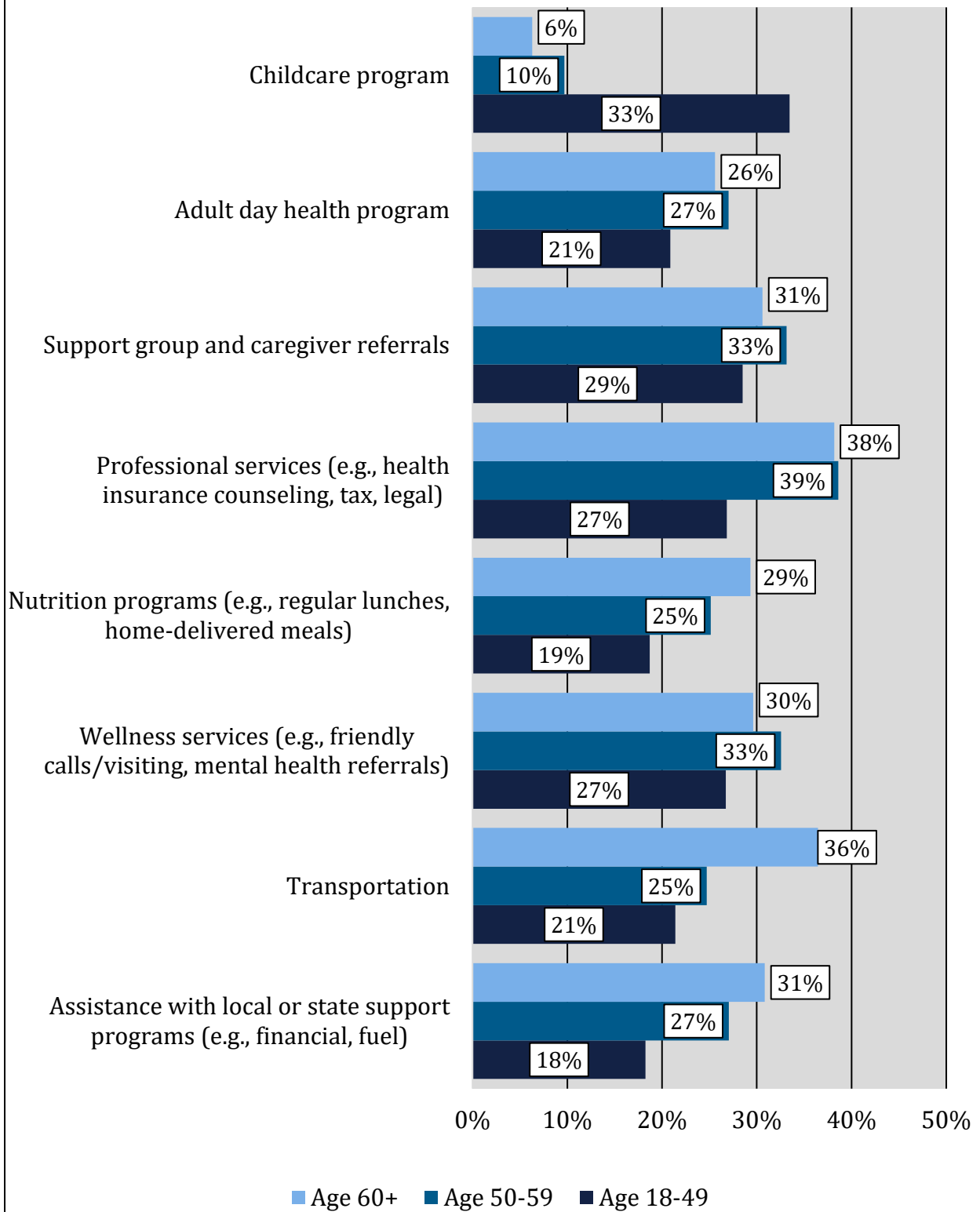
⁵ Note: This figure does not demonstrate likelihood to attend a senior center vs. likelihood to attend a community center. Rather, the statistics presented demonstrate the share of respondents reporting likelihood to attend a “new senior or community center” within each stated scenario preference.

Programs and Services

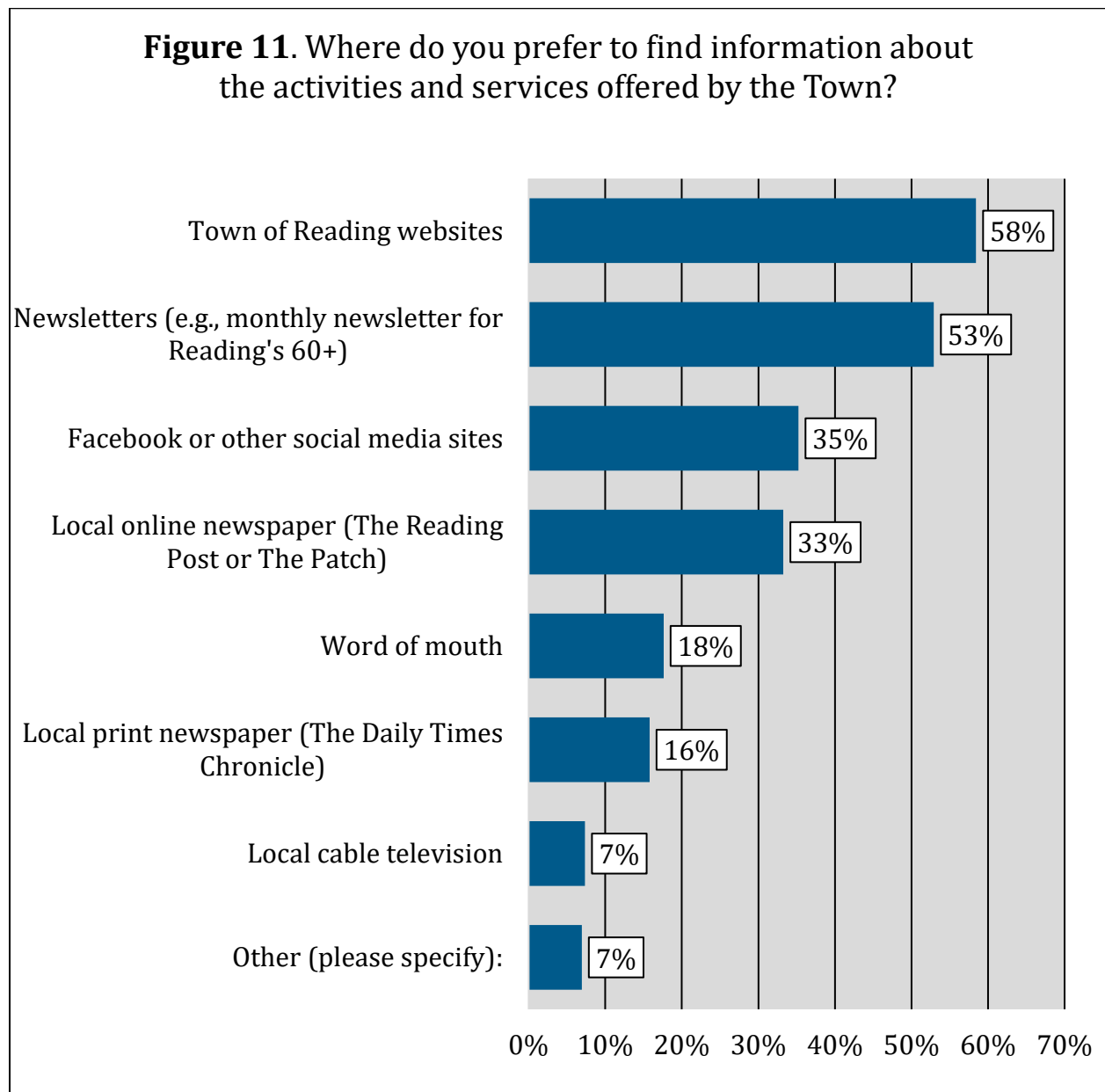
Programs and services are important to support residents' ability to age in place and in community. For example, those with mobility limitations and those who experience challenges with driving may need medical and social services that can be easily accessed or delivered within their homes. Programs that connect older homeowners with affordable assistance for maintaining their homes and yards can help protect the value of investments and improve the neighborhoods in which older people live. Elder care services play a part in helping residents age in place and in community. Involvement with municipal services and programs can help community members maintain social support, remain active, prolong independence, and improve quality of life. Some research suggests that participating in a Senior Center may reduce one's sense of isolation, a highly significant outcome given the negative consequences of being disconnected socially (Hudson, 2017).

An important provision from a new senior or community center may include services to support independence and wellbeing among residents. **Figure 10** displays the age breakdown respondents who rated services as important or very important to them or a member of their family. Professional services (36%), transportation (31%), and support group and caregiver referrals (31%) were most highly rated among all respondents. Among younger respondents, childcare was most frequently selected as important (33%), however this was least frequently selected by residents in their 50s (10%) and 60+ (6%). Similar shares of respondents identified caregiver support programs—adult day health, support groups, caregiver referrals—as important, suggesting that residents of all ages may be experiencing challenges related to caregiving and may benefit from different supports.

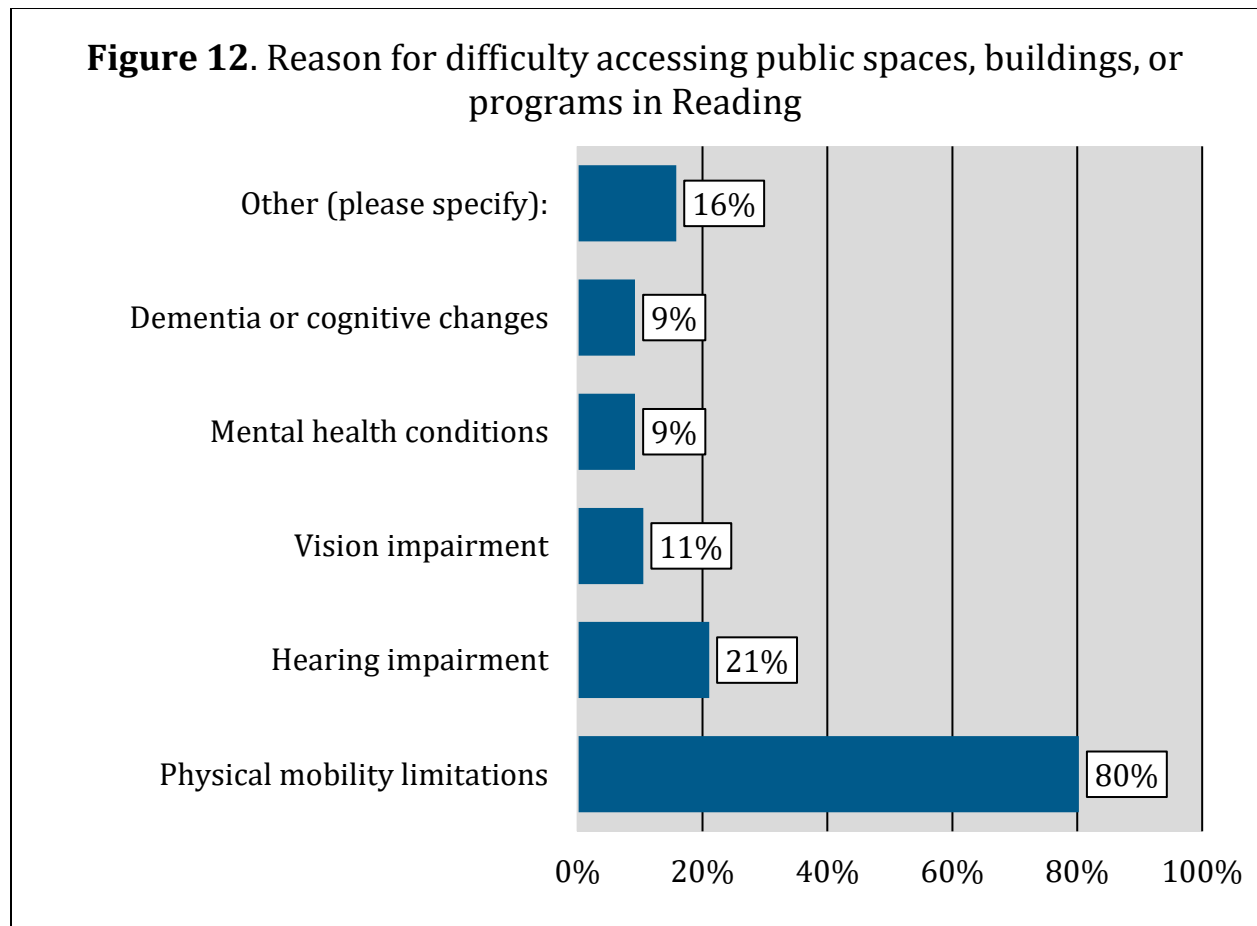
Figure 10. Important or Very Important services at this time, by age



Information about communication, information, and access to programs and services was collected from survey respondents to inform the development of a new senior or community center. **Figure 11** presents the preferred methods for learning about programs and services offered through the Town. Almost half of respondents reported the official Town of Reading website (58%) and newsletters (53%)—such as Pleasantries, distributed by the Pleasant Street Center—as preferred information sources. Other electronic means of communication were preferred by respondents, including social media (35%) and the local online newspaper (33%). A notable share of respondents identified word of mouth (18%) and the local print newspaper (16%) as preferred sources, suggesting that utilizing a variety of communications outlets will be effective in reaching a wide array of Town residents.

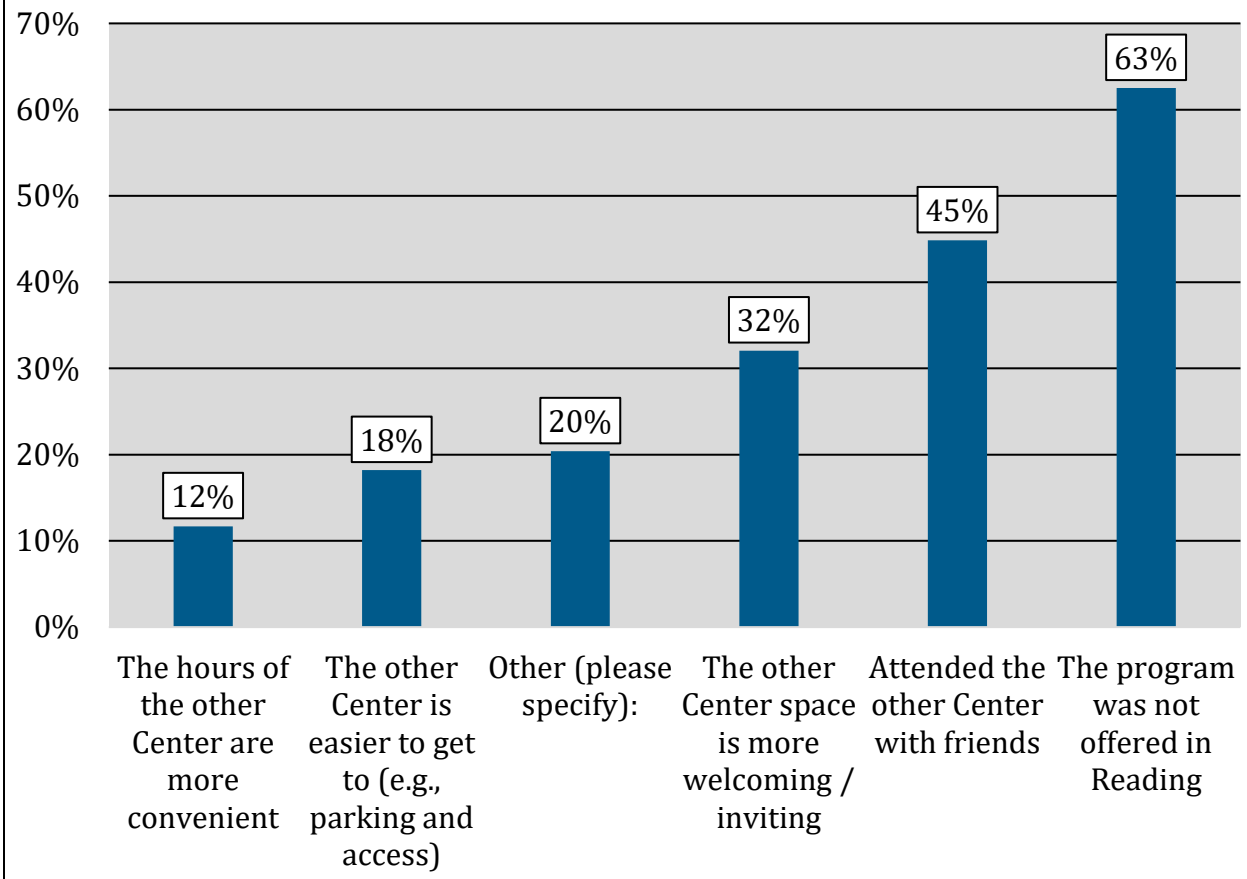


In considering accessibility, survey respondents were asked if they have a condition that limits their ability to access public spaces, buildings, or programs in Reading. A small share of respondents—5%—responded “yes,” and identified the type of condition (**Figure 12**). Physical mobility limitations (80%) were most frequently cited as challenging, as well as hearing impairment (21%) and Other (16%) conditions. Among those with a condition limiting access around Town, 34% selected two or more conditions (not shown), suggesting that there are Reading residents managing multiple conditions that limit their ability to participate fully in the community.



A small share (28%) of survey respondents have traveled to other senior or community centers, though that share increases with age (**Appendix B**). The top reasons for traveling to senior or community centers in other towns to participate in programs are reported in **Figure 13**. Among those who have traveled to other centers for programs, 63% reported going for a program not offered in Reading. Other reasons include attending with friends (45%) and finding the other center more welcoming or inviting (32%). Accessibility was key for some respondents, with 18% reporting easier parking and 12% reporting more convenient hours. A fifth of respondents who have traveled to other centers selected “Other,” and wrote-in their reason; common other reasons included greater variety of offerings, attending for a specific program (e.g., men’s breakfast, ballroom dance) and prior knowledge and previous experience with another center.

Figure 13. Reasons for attending a neighboring senior or community center



The final question of the survey was an open-ended question, inviting participants to share any additional thoughts, comments, or concerns about the future of the Pleasant Street Center or the development of a new senior or community center. Almost a third (n=470) of survey respondents provided feedback. Respondents provided several recommendations for programs and services to offer, indicating the need for a varied and robust set of offerings to attract a diverse array of residents. Relatedly, others considered key infrastructure components to be included, such as parking, accessibility, and staffing. Many respondents identified the Pleasant Street Center as a loved resource, offering suggestions to renovation the existing space or maintain it as a community asset. Relatedly, a number of residents expressed curiosity about the need for new space, unaware of the limitations of the Pleasant Street Center. Others felt that more coordinated use of other facilities in Reading would be sufficient. The concern about expected cost for development centered on almost all responses expressing resistance.

Table 7. Additional thoughts or comments about the future of the Pleasant Street Center or potential new senior/community center

Program and service suggestions
“Though our family does not need these services at this time, I would very much favor offering door-to-door transportation, food services, programming directed towards seniors.”
“I would appreciate age-appropriate activities and day trips that are not overly expensive but interesting. I would like to see more educational programs so I can be challenged mentally and entertained. I want to keep learning.”
“Programming for adults and children that is available for working parents. Many programs at library, etc. are only offered during the workday.”
“I suggest testing out the viability of some programming in a more temporary space before making a permanent capital commitment. Offer some state-of-the art programming opportunities -- professional cooking classes, professional arts, and wellness, and see what the appetite is for them.”
Infrastructure suggestions
“It is important to have staff who plan and advertise activities. Full-time responsibility should be given to someone to make the center a vibrant place for seniors and the community.”
“If the community decides on a multi-age community center, what if the PSC was used as an adult art center”
“This is a great opportunity to think holistically about what sort of experience we want to deliver in our downtown...Let's make sure we think not only about the new space itself, but how we can design the spaces around it to encourage use, get people there safely, and ultimately bring our community together.”
Uncertainty about the need and feasibility for new development
Resources already exist
“Focus should be on utilizing current facilities and not duplicating (i.e., we have a great performing arts space at the high school, we don't need another one), but creating something we don't have in town.”
“I'm not convinced the current center is inadequate. Could it still be used with some renovation? I haven't seen an analysis.”
Cost concerns
“What we have now is fine. No extra taxes especially with the cost of everything being so high. I'd rather have food in my refrigerator than a place to play games.”
“This will need to be balanced with several other items that have already been added to the tax base (high school, library, etc.) that are supposed to be limited in time frame for payback...There needs to be a plan to honestly finish paying for things before tacking on something else, so the taxes don't grow even more.”

Conclusions and Recommendations

This report describes research undertaken by the Center for Social & Demographic Research on Aging within the Gerontology Institute at the University of Massachusetts Boston, on behalf of the Town of Reading. The goals of this project were to (1) engage the community and (2) investigate the needs, interests, preferences, and opinions of Reading residents regarding the possibility of a new community or senior center. The content of this report is meant to inform the Reading Center for Active Living Committee (ReCalc) on its mission to *“explore the current and future needs of the community and initiate planning for a potential new senior/community center in town that will focus on residents aged 60+ and possibly other members of the community”*.

A broad range of findings are reported in this document, highlighting positive feedback as well as concerns about the potential for a new senior or community center, expressed by residents and other stakeholders. Many of our findings, and the recommendations that follow, intersect with the scope of responsibility held by many Boards and Departments in Reading; such that adequately responding to needs and concerns expressed in the community will require the involvement of other municipal offices and community stakeholders, and some will require a substantial collaborative effort. Thus, this report is intended to inform planning by Reading Center for Active Living Committee as well as other Town offices, private and public organizations that provide services and advocate for older people within Reading, and the community at large.

The current limits of the Pleasant Street Center building, the demands on current elder and human services staff, and anticipation of residents aging in Reading make timely the Reading Center for Active Living Committee’s charge. Findings from this study are clear that additional community space in Reading is desired and that to meet the diverse elder and human service needs of the population, different space is needed. Specifically, findings from this study inform the types of space that will accommodate the future needs of Reading and sustain it as a community in which residents have the opportunity to age well.

We summarize key findings and make the following recommendations to ReCalc and the Town of Reading:

Key Findings in Brief

- When asked about preference for a new senior or community center, 49% of survey respondents preferred an “all-ages community center including designated space and programming for residents age 60+.”
 - More than half of respondents under age 60 preferred an all-ages community center. In contrast, 36% of those in their 60s, 49% of those in their 70s, and 57% of respondents age 80 or older selected “senior center for residents age 60+” as their preference.

- Results from all data sources indicate that older residents are open to the idea of an all-ages community center, but value having their own space and experiences with peers.
- As well, 68% of all survey respondents reported that they would be likely or very likely to utilize a new senior/community center.
- Community forum participants highlighted the need for more information about the proposed new building prior to making a decision. As well, residents want to know how this initiative fits into the existing network of assets in the community.
- Cultivating an accessible and inclusive environment is necessary. Among the top priorities for a new space include low or no cost to participate, ample parking, and hours of operation that reflect the fact that more than half of survey respondents are working full or part time.
- Residents want to access space to participate in a variety of activities. Across age groups, multi-purpose spaces for both large and small group programs, area for indoor exercise classes, and café or meal space are among the top choices for how to design a new space.
- Beyond the physical space limitations (e.g., inability to host simultaneous programs, lack of a bathroom on the entry level, etc.), there was wide-recognition among focus group and forum participants that the staff of the Pleasant Street Center are maxed-out in their ability to meet the demands of the community. Suggestions for supporting and expanding the human services staff will be necessary to meet the wide array of resident needs and interests in a future space.

Recommendations for the Town of Reading

The following recommendations are made based on the information gathered from all components of this process. Although numbered for organizational purposes, the recommendations are not presented in no prioritized order.

1. Expand community awareness through active communication & public education about the planning process.

- Address strategies to improve awareness of and need for ReCalc and new community space.
 - For example, offer public tours of the Pleasant Street Center, highlighting the limitations of the space and equip members of ReCalc, COA, and Select Board with shared messaging about the project to ensure consistency in public education.
- Develop an inventory of existing programs and services available to Reading residents.
 - Consider resources by need (e.g., social services, healthcare, recreation) and age.
 - Document existing relationships with other organizations that serve Reading.
- Consider regular meetings with PSC staff and other local organizations (e.g., the Reading Public Library, the Burbank YMCA, local clergy, Reading Recreation, etc.) to improve collaboration and coordination of programs and services.

2. Improve accessibility and programming to ensure equitable access.

- Establish appropriate hours of operation that can accommodate working residents.
- Consider a multi-feature approach to transportation to improve accessibility:
 - Adequate parking spots
 - Satellite parking lot with shuttle transportation
 - Accessible via MBTA services
 - Develop door-to-door transportation services
- Develop infrastructure from an inclusive design perspective.
 - Consult existing resources for key design principles, such as those available through the [Massachusetts Age- and Dementia Friendly Integration Toolkit | Mass.gov](#)
- Maintain some separate space, programs, and services for older residents.
- Maintain core programs and services provided through Elder & Human Services.
- Maintain adequate access to food/nutrition services for older residents.
- Ensure that older residents have designated lounge space for informal gathering.
- Consider the development of inter-generational programming, in partnership with other town resources (e.g., Reading Public Library, Reading School Department).

3. Plan for a new center, including staffing levels consistent with demand.

- Include spaces that will support:
 - Small group or independent activities, such as book clubs, games, arts, and crafts
 - Exercise classes for large groups
 - Outdoor areas to relax or for light activity (e.g., lawn games, walking)
 - Regular opportunity to share a meal with others (e.g., congregate meals, café area)
 - Informal gathering and socialization
- Include large rooms that can accommodate many participants and that can be divided into multiple smaller rooms as well as be used for large community events.
- Account for classrooms and program rooms that have the technology for audio and visual presentations and the capability to receive participants who are participating virtually.
- Secure adequate private office spaces for staff to conduct 1-1 appointments with residents.
- Confirm ample staffing levels and appropriate positions to adequately serve residents.

References

Coyle, C. & Mutchler, J. (2017) "Aging in Reading, Massachusetts: A community needs assessment." Center for Social & Demographic Research on Aging Publications.

Hudson, R. (2017). Lack of social connectedness and its consequences. *Public Policy & Aging Report*, 27(4), 121-123.

Metropolitan Area Planning Council (n.d.) Regional Growth Projections. Available online: <https://www.mapc.org/learn/projections/>

Pardasani, M., & Thompson, P. (2012). Senior centers: Innovative and emerging models. *Journal of Applied Gerontology*, 31(1), 52-77.

Renski, H. & Strate, S. (March 2015). Section IV. Technical discussion of methods and assumptions. Report prepared by the Donahue Institute. Retrieved from http://pep.donahue-Institute.org/downloads/2015/new/UMDI_LongTermPopulationProjectionsReport_SECTION_4.pdf

U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.). The American Community Survey. Available online: <http://www.Census.gov>

Appendix A: Demographic Profile of Reading

As an initial step toward understanding characteristics of the Town of Reading’s population through quantitative data, we generated a demographic profile of the Town using data from the decennial U.S. Census and the American Community Survey (ACS)—a large, annual survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. For purposes of this assessment, we primarily used information drawn from the most current 5-year ACS files (2016-2020), along with U.S. Census data for the Town of Reading to summarize demographic characteristics including growth of the older population, shifts in the age distribution, gender, race and education distributions, householder status, living arrangements, household income, and disability status.

Age Structure and Population Growth

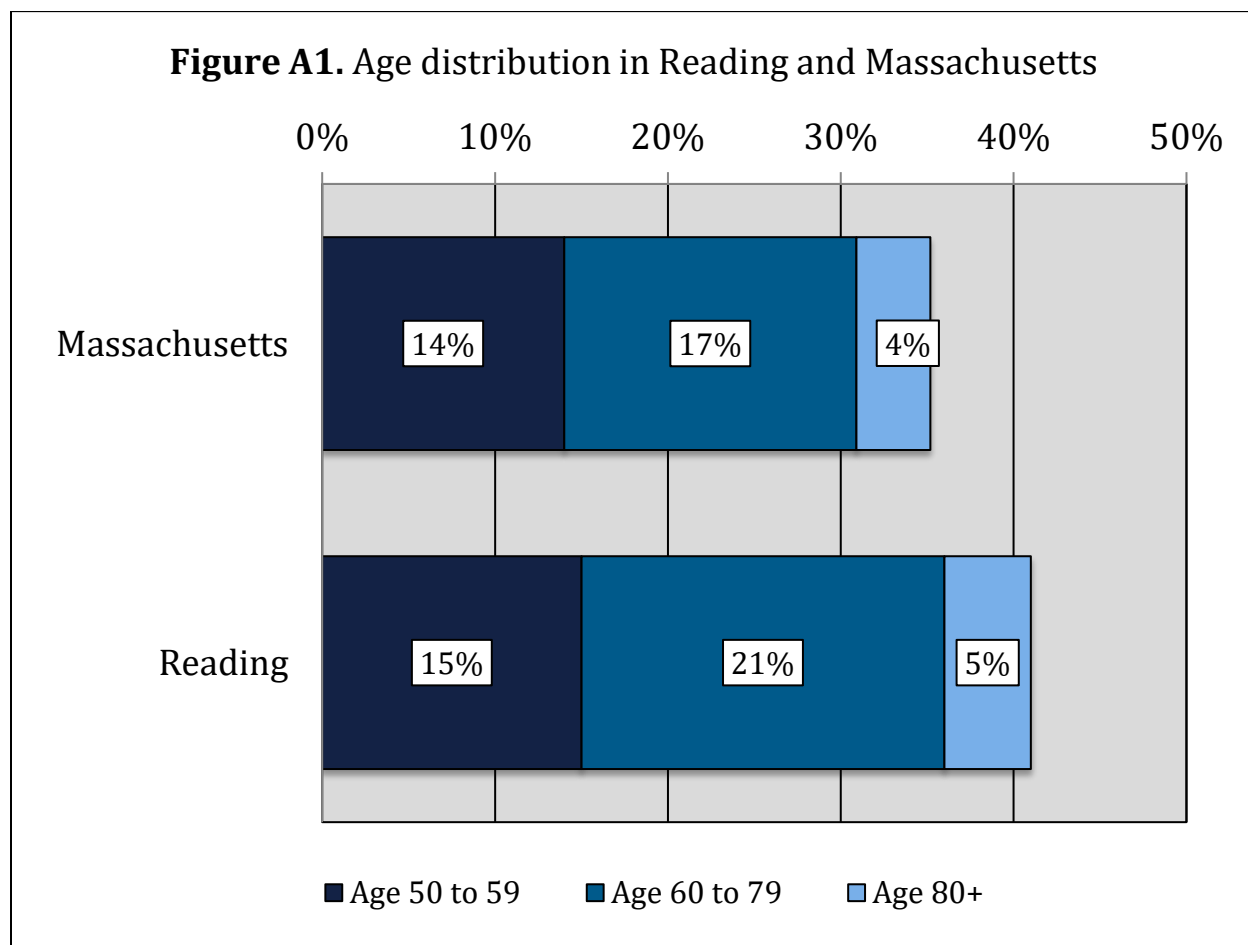
According to American Community Survey (ACS), there were about 25,236 residents living in the Town of Reading in 2020. About 41% of the population (10,291 individuals) were age 50 and older (See **Table A1**). Residents who were age 50 to 59 (3,803 individuals) made up 15% of the population; residents age 60 to 79 (5,266 individuals) comprised around 21%, and another 1,222 residents (5%) were age 80 and older. The gender distribution in Reading is on average ten men for each ten women (*ACS, 2016– 2020, Table B01001*).

Table A1. Number and percentage distribution of Reading’s population by age category, 2020

Age Category	Number	Percentage
Under age 18	6,187	24%
Age 18 to 49	8,758	35%
Age 50 to 59	3,803	15%
Age 60 to 79	5,266	21%
Age 80 and older	1,222	5%
Total	25,236	100%

Source: American Community Survey, 2016-2020, Table B01001. Numbers are calculated from 5-year survey estimates.

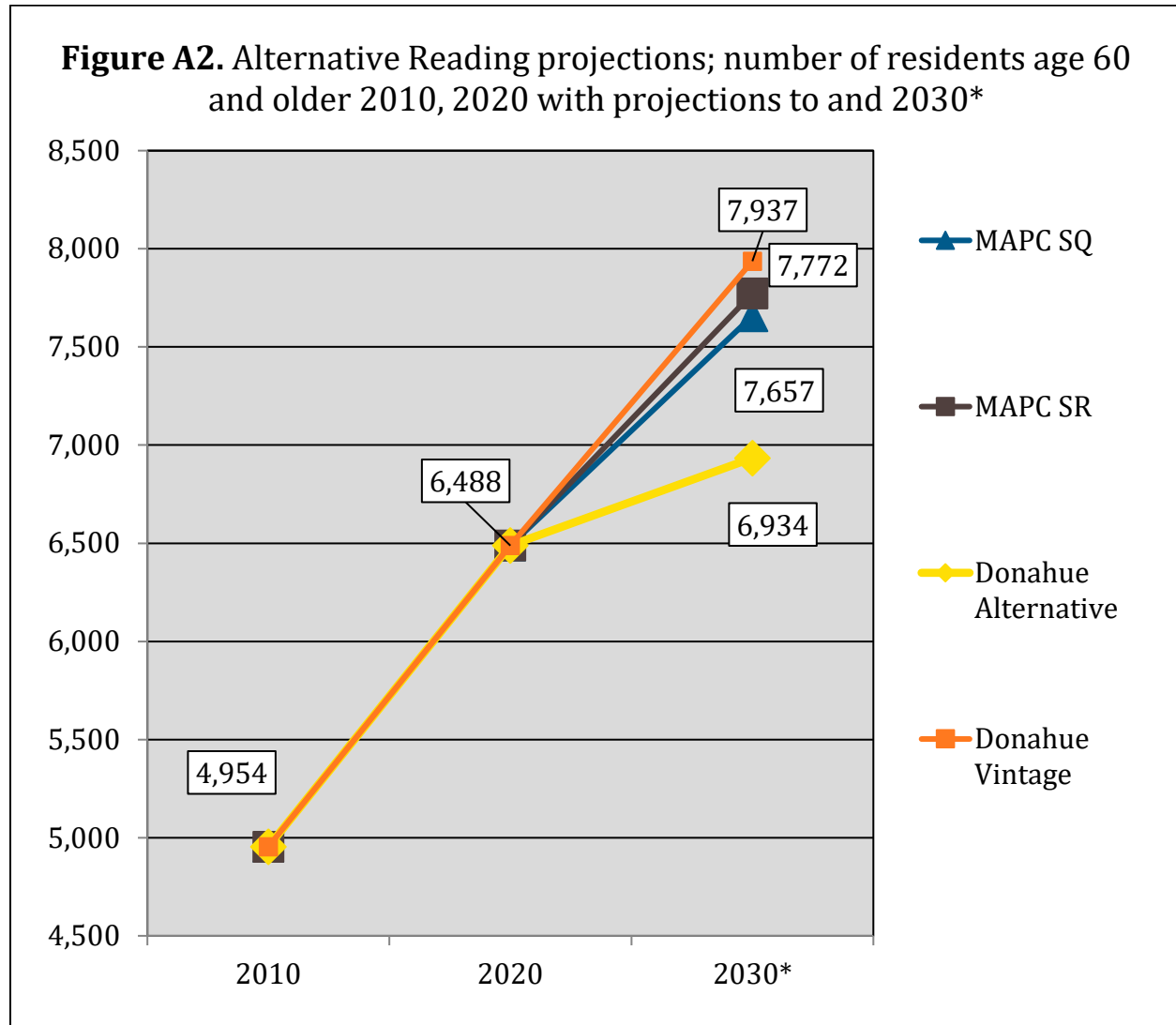
The share of Reading population age 50 and older is larger than the overall state of Massachusetts (**Figure A1**). About 36% of the Massachusetts population was in the 50+ age group in 2020, compared to 41% of the Reading population. Compared to the Commonwealth, Reading had a slightly higher portion of residents age 60 and older. However, the share of Reading residents age 80 and over is almost equal to the one estimated for the state as a whole. In 2020, Massachusetts residents age 60 and over comprised about 21% of the population, including 4% age 80 and over. In Reading, about 26% of the population was 60 or older, including 5% who were 80 years or older.



Source: American Community Survey, 2016-2020, Table B01001. Numbers are calculated from 5-year survey estimates

Population growth in both Massachusetts and the Town of Reading has been concentrated in older age groups. During 2000 and 2010, population of all ages increased by 4% in Reading as well as 3% in the state as whole. In both Reading and Massachusetts, the absolute numbers of residents age 50 and over, also grew substantially during this time period (*US Census, Table QT-P1*). The segment of Reading’s population age 50 to 59 increased in size by 33%, a rate of growth higher than in Massachusetts overall (29%). The population of residents who are age 60 and older increased by 15% in Reading, comparable to a 16% increase for the state.

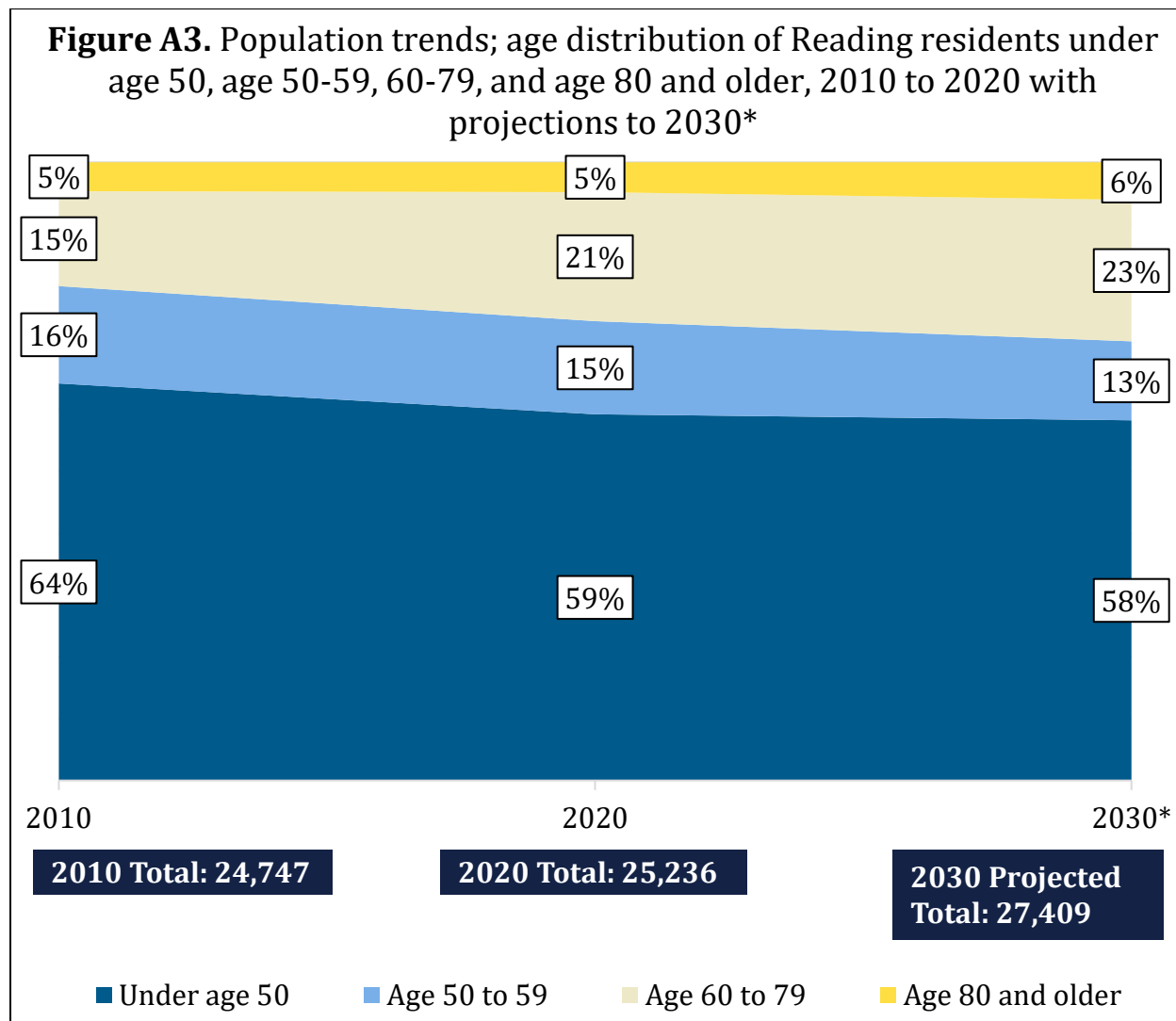
The increments in the share of older residents are projected to continue in the following decade. **Figure A2** shows four sets of projections for Reading population age 60 and over. Two sets are generated by the Donahue Institute at the University of Massachusetts, and two by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC). All of them suggest steady increments in the share of older population between 2010 and 2030.



Source: Population figures for 2010 are from the U.S. Census. Estimates for 2020 come from American Community Survey, 2016-2020, Table B01001. Numbers are calculated from 5-year survey estimates.

* The four sets of projections for 2030 are from two different sources: 1. Donahue Alternative and Vintage projections are estimated by the Donahue Institute, University of Massachusetts <http://pep.donahue-institute.org/> 2. MAPC Status Quo (SQ) and Stronger Region (SR) Scenarios projections are prepared by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council <https://www.mapc.org/learn/projections/>

Figure A3 shows the age distribution of Reading’s population from 2010 to 2020 and population projections for 2030⁶. In 2010, about 20% of the Town’s population was age 60 and older; this percentage increased to 26% by 2020. According to projections created by the Donahue Institute at the University of Massachusetts, a trend toward an older population is expected in future decades. Donahue Institute vintage projections suggest that by 2030, roughly one out of three Reading residents will be age 60 or older—23% of the Town’s population will be between the ages of 60 and 79, with an additional 6% age 80 and older.



Source: Population figures for 1990 thru 2010 are from the U.S. Census. Figures for 2020 are from American Community Survey, 2016-2020

* Figures for 2035 are the Vintage Population Projections generated by the Donahue Institute, University of Massachusetts: <http://pep.donahue-institute.org/>

⁶ Population projections are shaped by assumptions about birth rates and death rates, as well as domestic and international in-migration and out-migration. The Donahue Institute projections used here also account for population change associated with aging of the population, which is a strong predictor of future growth and decline of population levels. For more information on the methods used to create Donahue Institute projections, see Renski, Koshgarian, & Strate (March 2015).

Socio-Demographic Composition of Reading's Older Population

Reading is less diverse than the state with respect to race. For all ages combined, about 89% of Reading residents report their race as White non-Hispanic, compared to 73% in Massachusetts (*ACS, 2016-2020, Table B01001*). Concurrently, among older adults, Reading is less diverse. **Table A2** displays the race and ethnicity of Reading residents age 65 and older. The large majority of older residents report their race as white (92%). The remaining percentage of the population 65 and older reported Asian (7%), Black (<1%), or other race (<1%). Approximately 1% of older Reading residents report Hispanic ethnicity, regardless of racial identity.

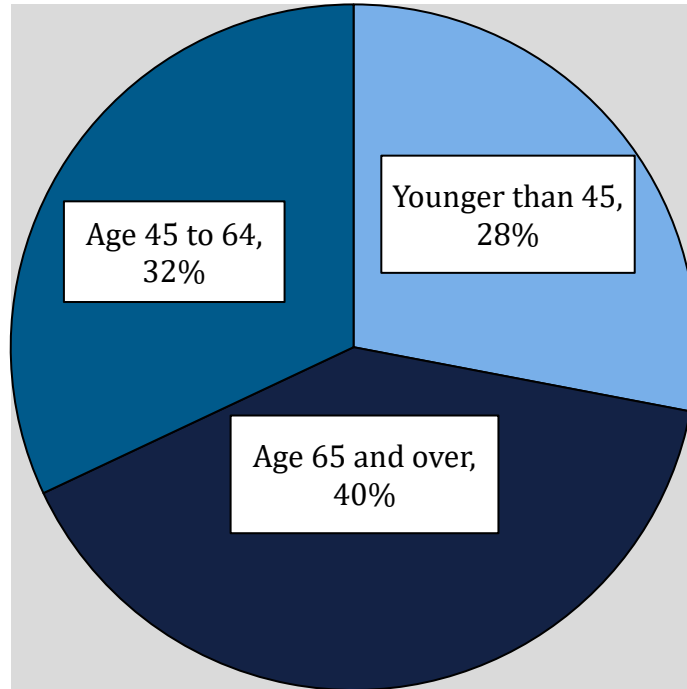
Table A2. Race distribution of residents who are age 65 and older in Reading

Race	Number	Percent
White	4,583	92%
Black	24	<1%
Asian	369	7%
Other	0	<1%
Total	5,002	100%
Hispanic	57	1%

Source: American Community Survey, 2016-2020, Tables B01001A-I. Numbers are calculated from 5-year survey estimates.

Additionally, almost 15% of older Reading residents speak a language other than English at home (*ACS, 2016-2020, Table B16004*). Those who speak another language other than English at home most commonly speak an Indo-European language (8%) followed by an additional 7% who speak an Asian and Pacific Island language.

Figure A4. Age structure of Reading householders



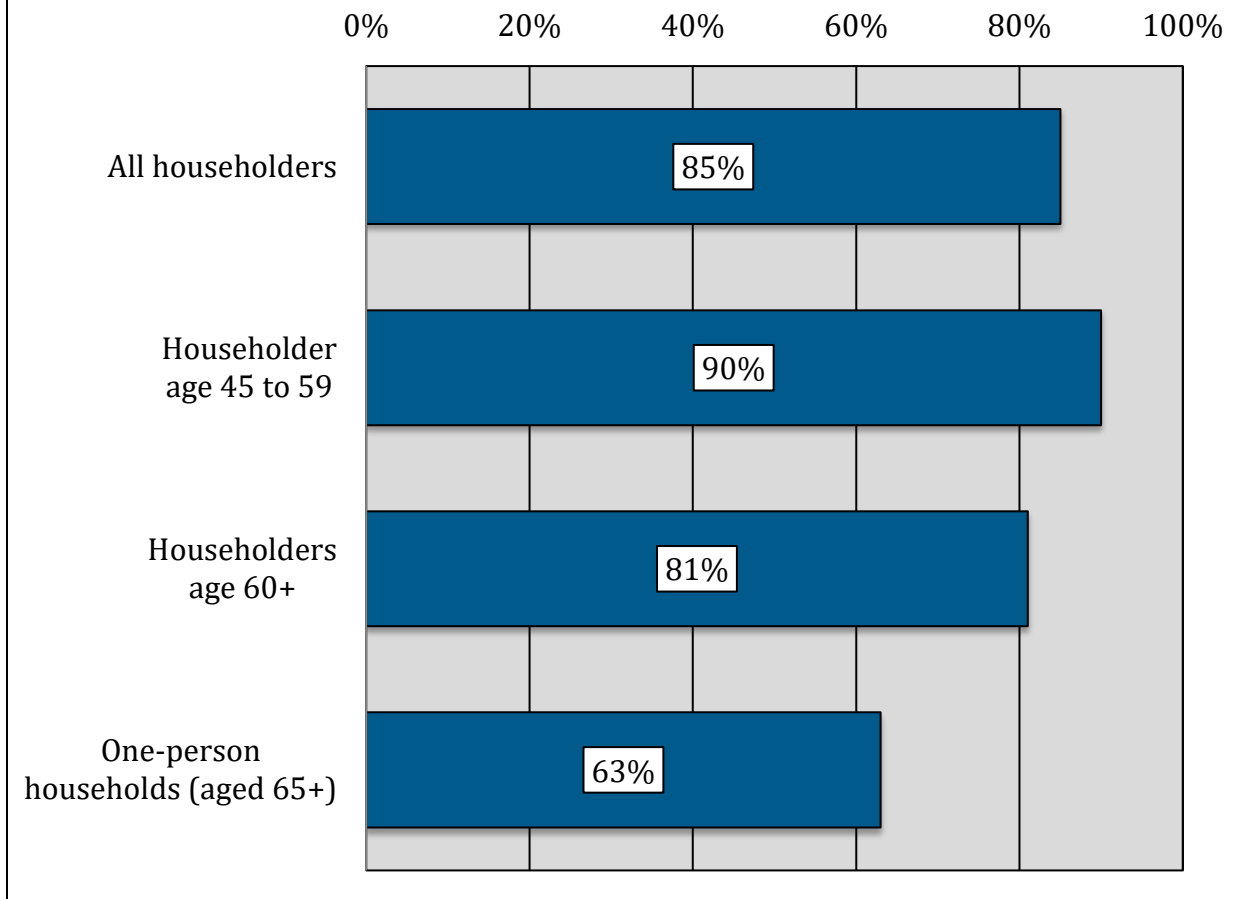
Source: American Community Survey, 2016-2020, Table B25007. Numbers are calculated from 5-year survey estimates.

A majority of Reading’s 9,374 households have householders who are middle-aged or older. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, a “householder” is the person reported as the head of household, typically the person in whose name the home is owned or rented. Residents age 45 and older are householders of 72% of all households in Reading⁷ including 32% of those who are age 65 and over (**Figure A4**).

Most Reading residents live in homes that they own or are purchasing (85%; **Figure A5**). Nearly 90% of residents age 45 to 64 own their homes, and 81% of householders 65 and older own their homes. A sizeable share of Reading residents who are 65 and older and live alone, also own their home (63%). The much higher number of older homeowners has implications for what amenities and services are likely to be needed and valued by members of the community. Home maintenance and supports are often necessary for older homeowners—especially those who live alone—in order to maintain comfort and safety in their homes.

⁷ Many available Census data on the older population of Reading are based on ages 45 and 65 as reference points rather than ages 50 and 60, as are used elsewhere in this report.

Figure A5. Percent of Reading householders who are homeowners by age category

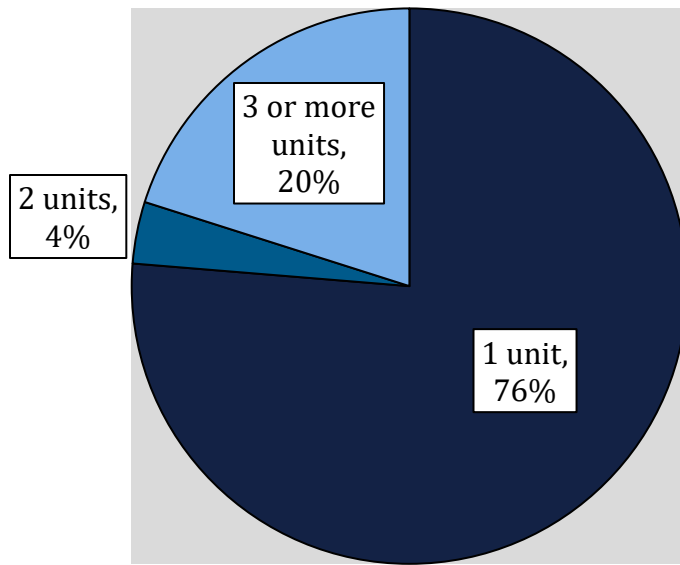


Source: American Community Survey, 2016-2020, Tables B25007 and B25011. Numbers are calculated from 5-year survey estimates.

Additionally, 46% of Reading’s 9,374 households have at least one individual who is age 60 or older (ACS 2016-2020, Table B11006). This high proportion— which is likely to increase in the future— generally reflects the widespread demand for programs, services, and other considerations that address aging-related concerns, including health and caregiving needs, transportation options, and safe home environments.

Among the 9,584 housing structures in Reading (**Figure A6**), 76% are single unit structures and the remaining 24% are housing structures that contain two or more housing units, which include apartment complexes.

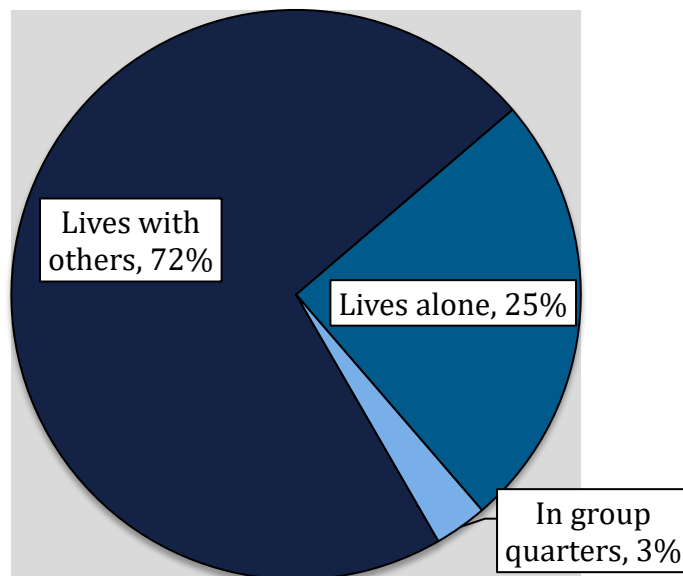
Figure A6. Number of units in Reading housing structures



Source: American Community Survey, 2016-2020, Table B25024. Numbers are calculated from 5-year survey estimates.

A large proportion of Reading residents who are age 65 and older (25%) live alone in their household whereas 72% live in households that include other people, such as a spouse, parents, children, or grandchildren (**Figure A7**). Additionally, around 3% of older Reading residents live within group quarters, such as nursing homes.

Figure A7. Living arrangements of Reading residents, age 65 and older



Source: American Community Survey, 2016-2020, Table B09020. Numbers are calculated from 5-year survey estimates.

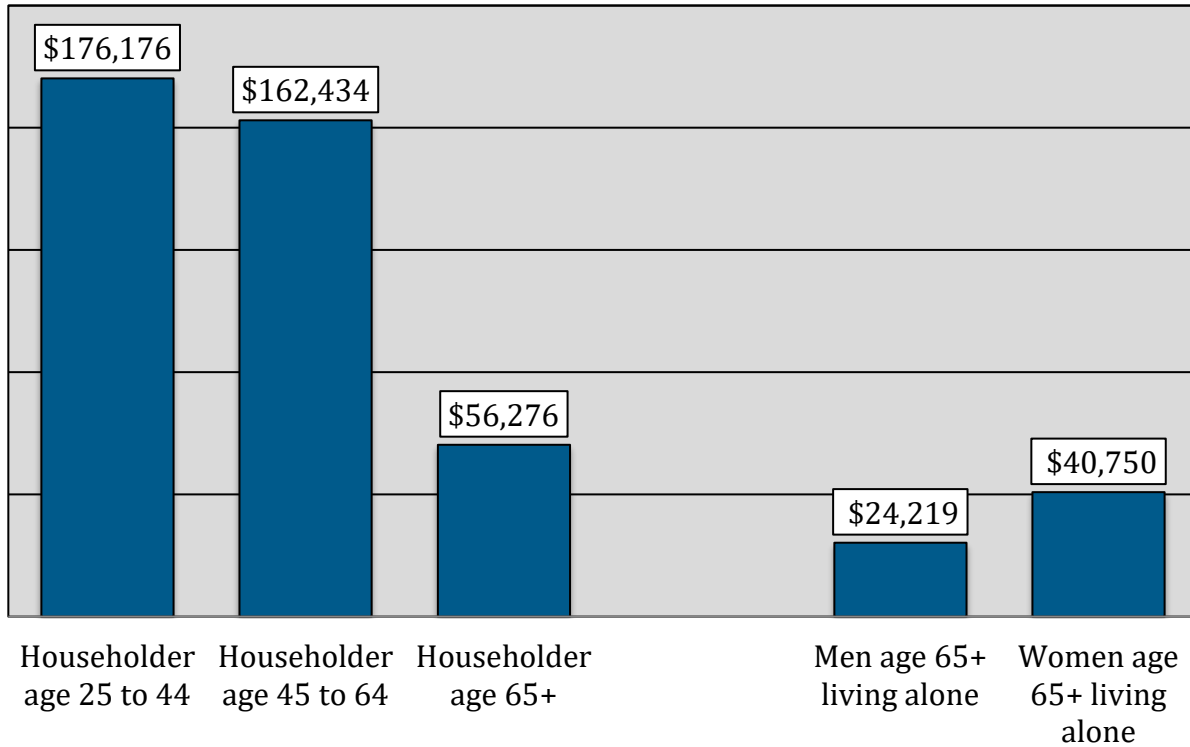
American Community Survey estimates on education suggest that Reading residents are well educated on average. About 43% of persons 65 and older have either a bachelor's degree (23%) or a graduate/professional (19%; *ACS, 2016-2020, Table B15001*). This educational profile contributes to the vitality and character of the community, which depends on older adults who value opportunities to be involved through volunteer and civic engagement activities, as well as late-life learning opportunities— activities that are often present in highly educated communities (Fitzgerald & Caro, 2014).

Similar to older adults living in communities throughout the U.S., a sizeable proportion of Reading residents aged 65 and over remain in the workforce. Almost 37% of adults age 64 to 74 are participating in the labor force. Of those age 75 and older, nearly 9% remain in the workforce (*ACS, 2016-2020, Table S2301*).

Nearly 31% of men age 65 and older report veteran status (*ACS, 2016-2020, Table B21001*). As a result, many of the Town's older residents may be eligible to receive some benefits and program services based on their military service or that of their spouses.

With respect to household income, there is some comparative disadvantage of some older residents in Reading (**Figure A8**). Reading residents' median household income is considerably higher than the one estimated for Massachusetts as a whole, \$131,515 compared to \$74,167. Among Reading's householders, those aged 45 to 64 have a median income at \$162,434—which is greater than the statewide median for this age group (\$92,096). Among householders 65 and older, the median income is \$56,276, also higher than the statewide median for this age group (\$45,167), and much lower than the median income of younger Reading householders. Older residents living alone are at the greatest disadvantage in terms of household income. Older men living alone have considerably lower median income (\$24,219) than women (\$40,750) Given that about 25% of older residents age 65 and older live alone in Reading, these figures suggest that a sizeable number of residents are at risk of economic insecurity.

Figure A8. Median household income in Reading by age and living situation of householder (in 2020 inflation-adjusted dollars)

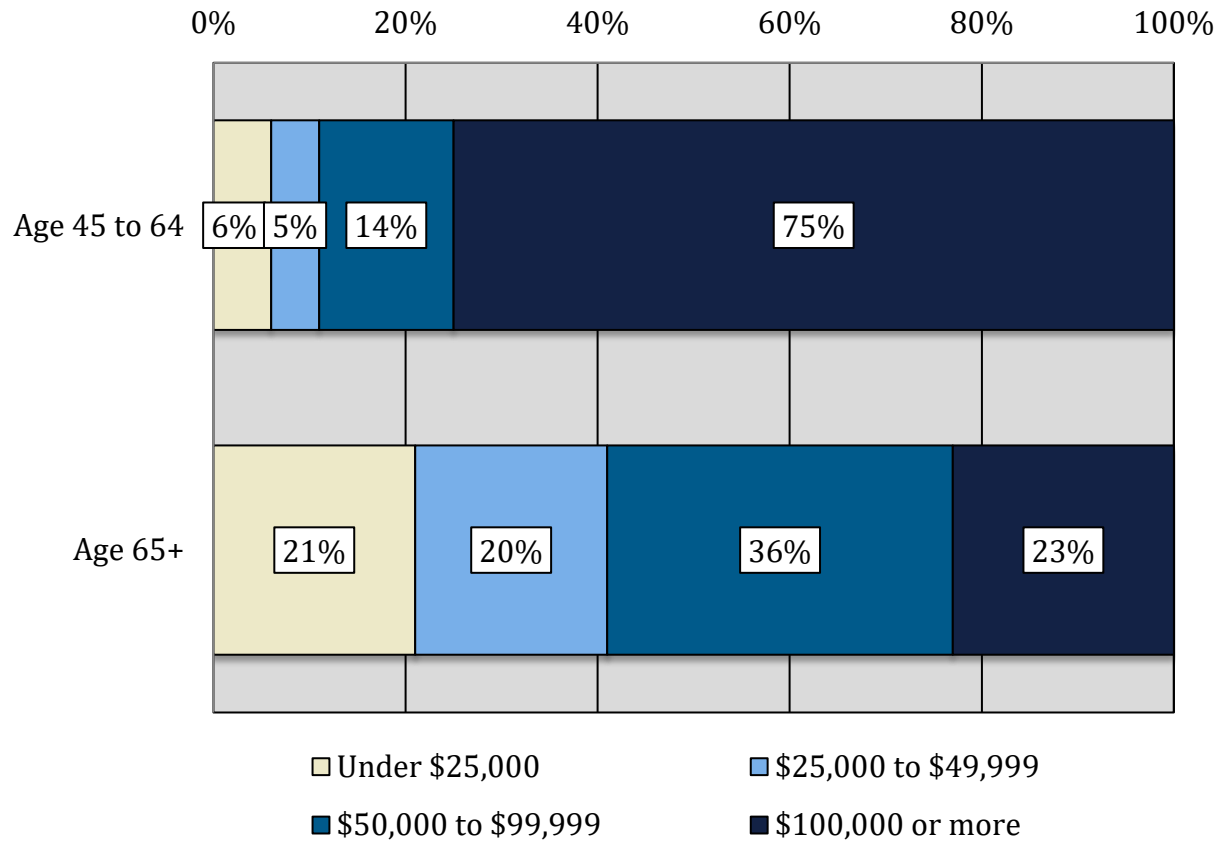


Source: American Community Survey, 2016-2020, Tables B19049 and B19215. Numbers are calculated from 5-year survey estimates.

Note: Includes only community households, not group quarters such as nursing homes.

The economic profile of older Reading residents relative to younger residents is further illustrated in **Figure A9**, which shows that the older adult population lives on a modest income. Almost a quarter of Reading residents age 65 and older report incomes of \$100,000 or more. By comparison, 75% of households headed by younger residents report this level of income. Nevertheless, a large share of households headed by someone age 65 and older (21%) report annual incomes under \$25,000. This compares with just 7% of households headed by individuals age 45 to 64 having incomes under \$25,000. Thus, there is a sizeable segment of Reading's older population that is at risk of financial insecurity or economic disadvantage.

Figure A9. Household income distribution in Reading by age of householder (in 2020 inflation-adjusted dollars)

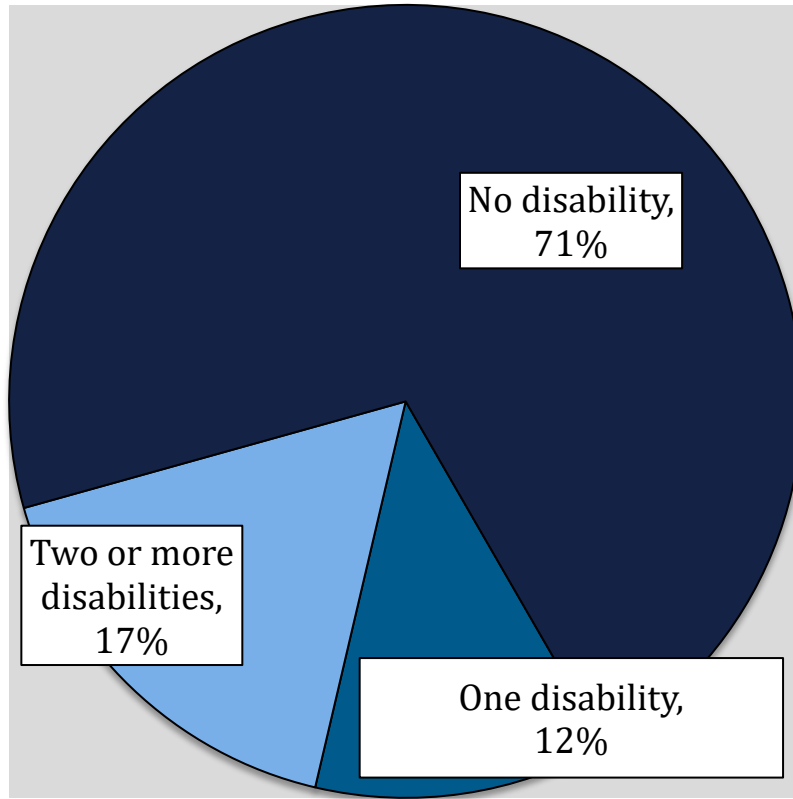


Source: American Community Survey, 2016-2020, Table B19037. Numbers are calculated from 5-year survey estimates.

Note: Includes only community households, not group quarters such as nursing homes.

The increased likelihood of acquiring disability with age is evident in data from the ACS. Many Reading residents age 65 and older experience some level of disability that could impact their ability to function independently in the community. About 12% of Reading’s residents age 65 and older have one disability, and nearly 17% report two or more disabilities (**Figure A10**). Among the different types of disability that are assessed in ACS, the most commonly cited by Reading residents 65 and older were ambulatory issues (19%), followed by independent living limitations (14%; difficulty doing errands alone, such as visiting a doctor’s office or shopping), and hearing issues (13%). Other disabilities experienced by older Reading residents include cognitive difficulty (6%), self-care difficulties (4%), and vision impairment (4%; ACS 2016-2020, Table S1810).

Figure A10. Percentage of Reading residents age 65+ reporting at least one disability



Source: U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2016-2020, Table C18108.

Percentages by age group do not sum to 100% because people may report multiple difficulties and do not include those with no difficulties assessed by the ACS.

Appendix B: Survey Results

Note: Appendix tables are based on 1,470 responses to the Town of Reading Survey of Residents, conducted in September 2022. The survey was predominantly online, with 11% completed by hand. See text for additional details.

Section I. Community & Neighborhood

Q1. How long have you lived in the Town of Reading?

	All ages	Age 18-49	Age 50-59	Age 60-69	Age 70-79	Age 80+
Fewer than 5 years	10%	26%	6%	4%	7%	4%
5-14 years	19%	45%	17%	9%	10%	16%
15-24 years	16%	17%	40%	13%	10%	5%
25-34 years	19%	7%	20%	39%	12%	4%
35-44 years	16%	5%	3%	23%	30%	8%
45 years or longer	20%	0%	14%	12%	31%	63%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Q2. How important is it to you to remain living in Reading as you get older?

	All ages	Age 18-49	Age 50-59	Age 60-69	Age 70-79	Age 80+
Very important	47%	22%	32%	50%	65%	72%
Somewhat important	35%	43%	42%	35%	29%	23%
Slightly important	11%	19%	15%	10%	5%	5%
Not at all important	7%	16%	11%	5%	1%	0%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Q3. Do you plan to stay in Reading for the next 5 years or more?

	All ages	Age 18-49	Age 50-59	Age 60-69	Age 70-79	Age 80+
Yes, I plan to stay in Reading in my current home	88%	90%	88%	86%	87%	90%
Yes, I plan to stay in Reading but would move to a smaller home or apartment	7%	3%	6%	8%	10%	7%
No, I plan to move out of Reading	5%	7%	6%	6%	3%	3%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Section II: Future Senior Center/Community Center

Q5. The Town of Reading is considering a new Senior/Community Center. Please select your most preferred scenario.

	All ages	Age 18-49	Age 50-59	Age 60-69	Age 70-79	Age 80+
A Senior Center for residents age 60+	33%	11%	21%	36%	49%	57%
An all-ages Community Center including designated space and programming for residents age 60+	49%	72%	54%	45%	36%	30%
I have no preference	10%	8%	12%	10%	9%	10%
Other (please specify):	8%	9%	13%	9%	6%	3%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Q7. What is your preference for the location of a future senior/community center?

	All ages	Age 18-49	Age 50-59	Age 60-69	Age 70-79	Age 80+
Located in the downtown area	32%	33%	30%	31%	34%	35%
Located outside of the downtown area	10%	9%	8%	10%	11%	8%
I have no preference on location in Reading	42%	44%	45%	44%	37%	46%
Other (please specify):	16%	14%	17%	15%	18%	11%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Q8. Cost is a major consideration. For FY22, the average tax bill was \$9,313. If it meant an increase to your household taxes during a set period of time, please indicate the maximum amount you might support for a new senior center or community center.

	All ages	Age 18-49	Age 50-59	Age 60-69	Age 70-79	Age 80+
Less than \$100 per year	17%	15%	14%	20%	19%	12%
\$100 - \$200 per year	24%	23%	26%	26%	22%	21%
\$201 - \$300 per year	12%	13%	14%	11%	11%	12%
\$301 - \$400 per year	4%	4%	4%	5%	6%	4%
\$401 - \$500 per year	3%	5%	4%	2%	2%	4%
\$501+ per year	3%	4%	2%	2%	3%	3%
No increase; I would only support a new building if it came at no additional cost to residents	31%	30%	34%	30%	30%	30%
N/A, I am not responsible for paying property taxes at this time	6%	6%	2%	4%	7%	14%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Q9. Which of the following types of indoor space would you prioritize in a new senior or community center? (Please select no more than 7)

	All ages	Age 18-49	Age 50-59	Age 60-69	Age 70-79	Age 80+
Kitchen and dining space	43%	29%	40%	42%	49%	63%
Teaching kitchen	14%	21%	16%	14%	7%	6%
Café or “drop in” food space	45%	41%	47%	48%	46%	40%
Dedicated arts and crafts space (e.g., painting, fiber arts, pottery equipment)	42%	43%	47%	40%	41%	41%
Dedicated shop space (e.g., woodworking, machine shop)	18%	21%	20%	19%	16%	10%
Multipurpose space for small group activities (e.g., book club, meetings, card games)	68%	68%	67%	67%	69%	69%
Multipurpose space for large group activities (e.g., concerts, lectures, parties)	48%	42%	48%	48%	51%	51%
Space for games (e.g., mah-jongg, bridge, chess) and billiards	40%	44%	38%	40%	38%	41%
Performance space (e.g., stage, large screen, seating for audience)	23%	23%	22%	22%	23%	28%
Lobby or lounge space for informal socializing	39%	35%	38%	35%	41%	50%
Technology space (e.g., public computers, video games, printing)	33%	33%	32%	31%	35%	35%
Quiet space (e.g., library, reading, studying rooms)	16%	15%	16%	14%	18%	15%
Multipurpose team exercise space (e.g., basketball, tennis, pickleball)	21%	34%	20%	21%	15%	8%
Indoor exercise space for classes (e.g., yoga, Zumba, Pilates)	59%	52%	54%	60%	67%	60%
Indoor exercise with fitness equipment (e.g., weights, treadmill)	26%	22%	19%	26%	34%	28%
Swimming pool	14%	25%	10%	13%	11%	10%
Other (please specify):	9%	8%	14%	11%	6%	6%

**Figures do not sum to 100%*

Q10. Which of the following types of outdoor space would you prioritize in a new senior or community center? (Please select no more than 5)

	All ages	Age 18-49	Age 50-59	Age 60-69	Age 70-79	Age 80+
Picnic tables/outdoor dining space	62%	62%	58%	61%	62%	67%
Benches or comfortable outdoor seating	69%	53%	68%	73%	77%	80%
Gardening area	37%	45%	43%	36%	31%	24%
Outdoor exercise space (e.g., outdoor gym equipment)	11%	9%	8%	11%	15%	11%
Team exercise space (e.g., basketball, tennis, or baseball fields, pickleball courts)	21%	29%	25%	23%	13%	7%
Grass area for lawn games (e.g., bocce, cornhole, croquet)	44%	52%	52%	44%	37%	31%
Swimming pool	14%	29%	12%	10%	9%	8%
A walking/running track	34%	31%	30%	34%	38%	35%
Playground	14%	31%	14%	13%	5%	2%
Splash pad	12%	33%	11%	7%	5%	2%
Other (please specify):	8%	9%	11%	7%	8%	4%

**Figures do not sum to 100%*

Q11. Which of the following accessibility features would you prioritize in considering a future senior center or community center? (Please select no more than 5)

	All ages	Age 18-49	Age 50-59	Age 60-69	Age 70-79	Age 80+
Door to door transportation to and from the new center	47%	34%	49%	48%	48%	64%
No or little cost to participate in programs	66%	63%	62%	68%	70%	66%
Ample parking	64%	48%	54%	65%	78%	81%
Dedicated space for older residents	44%	35%	46%	44%	48%	54%
The facility being open in the evenings and on weekends	49%	58%	53%	51%	44%	30%
Enough space for multiple programs to be running simultaneously	48%	49%	50%	46%	52%	42%
Programming that integrated residents of all ages	31%	53%	34%	28%	22%	14%
More remote (online) programming	7%	5%	6%	7%	9%	6%
Free wi-fi access	37%	40%	39%	39%	37%	27%
Other (please specify):	6%	6%	9%	5%	3%	6%

**Figures do not sum to 100%*

Q12. If a new senior or community center was developed, how likely would you or members of your household be to use the facility?

	All ages	Age 18-49	Age 50-59	Age 60-69	Age 70-79	Age 80+
Very likely	41%	27%	26%	42%	55%	58%
Somewhat likely	28%	32%	31%	30%	22%	22%
Unsure	19%	25%	24%	15%	16%	15%
Somewhat unlikely	3%	5%	5%	4%	2%	2%
Very unlikely	9%	11%	14%	9%	5%	3%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Section III: Programs & Services

Q13. Where do you prefer to find information about the activities and services offered by the Town?

	All ages	Age 18-49	Age 50-59	Age 60-69	Age 70-79	Age 80+
Newsletters (e.g., monthly newsletter for Reading's 60+)	59%	34%	44%	58%	82%	84%
Local cable television	8%	1%	7%	8%	11%	20%
Word of mouth	20%	33%	21%	15%	13%	18%
Town of Reading websites	65%	71%	68%	72%	61%	38%
Local print newspaper (The Daily Times Chronicle)	18%	7%	19%	20%	21%	25%
Local online newspaper (The Reading Post or The Patch)	37%	30%	40%	43%	42%	22%
Facebook or other social media sites	39%	64%	55%	36%	22%	10%
Other (please specify):	8%	9%	9%	8%	5%	6%

**Figures do not sum to 100%*

Q14. Have you ever traveled to senior or community centers in other towns to participate in their programs?

	All ages	Age 18-49	Age 50-59	Age 60-69	Age 70-79	Age 80+
Yes	28%	20%	18%	25%	37%	50%
No	72%	80%	83%	75%	63%	50%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

**Q15. For what reason(s) did you attend the neighboring senior or community center?
(Check all that apply)**

	All ages	Age 18-49	Age 50-59	Age 60-69	Age 70-79	Age 80+
The program was not offered in Reading	62%	54%	68%	59%	62%	72%
The other Center is easier to get to (e.g., parking and access)	19%	11%	14%	18%	22%	23%
Attended the other Center with friends	45%	35%	30%	53%	45%	53%
The hours of the other Center are more convenient	12%	12%	14%	17%	12%	3%
The other Center space is more welcoming / inviting	33%	11%	30%	42%	43%	22%
Other (please specify):	21%	25%	22%	15%	18%	28%

**This table only includes respondents who reported traveling to senior or community centers in other towns. Figures do not sum to 100%.*

Q16. Please rate the importance of the following services to you or a member of your family at this time. % rated “very important” or “important”.

	All ages	Age 18-49	Age 50-59	Age 60-69	Age 70-79	Age 80+
Assistance with local or state support programs (e.g., financial, fuel)	27%	18%	27%	29%	32%	32%
Transportation	31%	21%	25%	30%	35%	56%
Wellness services (e.g., friendly calls/visiting, mental health referrals)	29%	27%	33%	31%	28%	32%
Nutrition programs (e.g., regular lunches, home-delivered meals)	26%	19%	25%	29%	27%	37%
Professional services (e.g., health insurance counseling, tax, legal)	36%	27%	39%	39%	36%	41%
Support group and caregiver referrals	31%	29%	33%	32%	29%	32%
Adult day health program	25%	21%	27%	29%	24%	21%
Childcare program	13%	33%	10%	8%	5%	4%

**Figures do not sum to 100%*

Q17. Do you have a condition that limits you from being able to access public spaces, buildings, or programs in Reading?

	All ages	Age 18-49	Age 50-59	Age 60-69	Age 70-79	Age 80+
Yes	6%	1%	3%	4%	8%	20%
No	94%	99%	97%	96%	92%	80%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Q18. Please select which of the following conditions best describes the reason why you have difficulty accessing public spaces, buildings, or programs in Reading.

	All ages
Physical mobility limitations	80%
Hearing impairment	21%
Vision impairment	11%
Mental health conditions	9%
Dementia or cognitive changes	9%
Other (please specify):	16%

**This table only includes respondents who reported having a condition that limits their access to public spaces, buildings, and programs in Reading. Age breakdown is not provided due to small cell sizes. Figures do not sum to 100%.*

Section IV: Demographic information

Q19. Please select your gender identity.

	All ages	Age 18-49	Age 50-59	Age 60-69	Age 70-79	Age 80+
Female	63%	62%	67%	62%	62%	64%
Male	37%	37%	33%	38%	39%	36%
Other (please specify):	<1%	--	--	--	--	--
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Q20. What is your age range?

Age	Percent responded
18-29	1%
30-49	18%
50-59	14%
60-69	23%
70-79	22%
80+	9%
No Response	12%
Total	100%

Q21. What is your employment status? (Check all that apply)

	All ages	Age 18-49	Age 50-59	Age 60-69	Age 70-79	Age 80+
Working full-time	39%	82%	73%	33%	4%	0%
Working part-time	13%	13%	18%	18%	10%	0%
Retired	45%	0%	3%	49%	86%	100%
Other (please specify):	4%	6%	7%	5%	2%	0%

**Figures do not sum to 100%*

Q22. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: "I have adequate resources to meet my financial needs, including home maintenance, personal healthcare, and other expenses."

	All ages	Age 18-49	Age 50-59	Age 60-69	Age 70-79	Age 80+
Strongly Agree	42%	62%	45%	38%	34%	26%
Agree	49%	32%	46%	54%	55%	64%
Disagree	7%	5%	6%	6%	9%	7%
Strongly Disagree	2%	1%	3%	2%	2%	2%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%