

A Livable Community

By Joanne Fisher, Program Coordinator

As we evolve as a society, our language and word definitions change also. In this way, we can better communicate new ideas that once had no language. A “*Livable Community*” is one such phrase. Not so long ago a livable community was one where an individual felt safe and familiar and had services and recreation close at hand. Today that definition has expanded to include very specific new standards for “livability”.

- ❖ **Livable Community-** A livable community is one that has affordable and appropriate housing, supportive community features and services, and adequate mobility options, which together facilitate personal independence and the engagement of residents in civic and social life. (AARP Public Policy Institute, 2005, *Livable Communities: An Evaluation Guide*)

The concept of a livable community has many facets and in a community that successfully combines them, an environment that is suitable for everyone emerges. Different factions of the community require different elements that need attention. Young children, teen-agers, young adults, young parents, the disabled of any age and senior citizens, all have slightly differing needs. There are some needs shared by some groups and some needs shared by all groups. The challenge of developing a comprehensive livable community is to address *all* of these needs.

Many movers and shakers throughout the country and the world are working on the development of “livability” for their designated group or groups. Many grassroots organizations are also looking closely at assessing and addressing the needs of their small neighborhoods, and in this way, they are working toward the goal of creating a more “livable” environment.

A key component of a livable community is the concept of “*Aging in Place*”. This is the focus of our energy in the Department of Senior Services. The Newton Senior Center has conducted focus groups, led by Marian Knapp, that have explored the phrase “Aging in Place” and what it means to individuals. Marian is a frequent contributor to this column and after receiving her PhD just a few short years ago, has committed herself to furthering Newton’s efforts to become a perfect place to “age”. When the needs and desires of the aging population are addressed, the entire community is strengthened. By helping senior citizens to remain in the community their wisdom, skills and life lessons remain with them as a valuable resource, thus making the community *more livable*.

Several specific services have been the target of the Department of Senior Services work in this area, among them; Transportation, the Tax work-off program and the Contractor Referral list. (Contact: Lynn Feinman, Aging in Place Program Manager- 617-796-1675, at the Newton Senior Center, for more information.)

Universal Design is another new phrase used to describe the design of products and environments created to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without further adaptation or specialized design. Just as parents have “baby-proofed” their homes and those with disabilities have adapted their homes, so must the senior population make adaptations to their individual and community environments that broaden, not limit, access for all.