



## Measuring a Community's Lifelong Assets

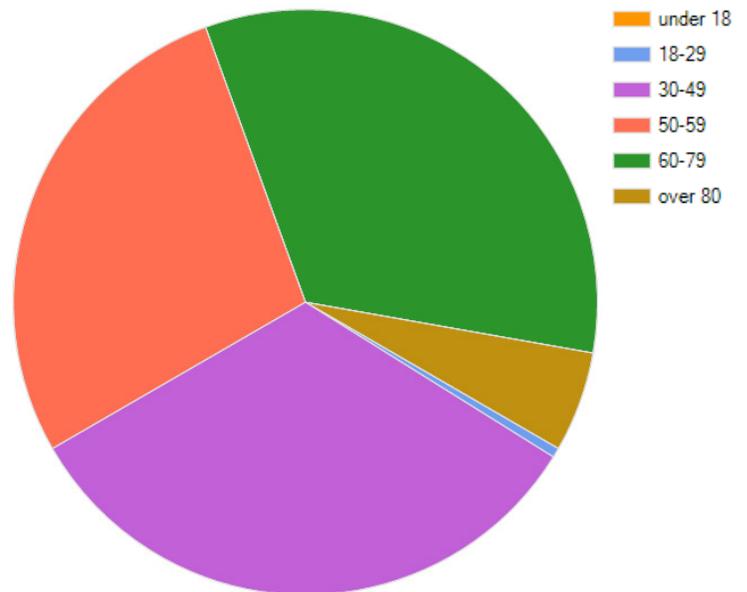
The term "Lifelong Community" describes a neighborhood or community that fosters a high quality of life by offering choices to all residents, regardless of age. A person's family size, health status, social and supportive needs change as one ages. Avondale Estates city officials and community leaders are committed to helping residents age in place.



In January, the City of Avondale Estates and the Atlanta Regional Commission asked residents of Avondale Estates to take a survey measuring the importance of neighborhood assets related to Lifelong Communities. Participants ranked the importance of transportation options, housing assets and opportunities for healthy living in their neighborhood, and space was given so citizens could add their own comments. The survey was mailed to 653 residents who did not have email addresses. City eNews containing a link to the online survey were emailed to 959 residents. The response was tremendous, with 381 residents completing the survey questions and providing additional comments.



**Age Distribution of Survey Respondents**



More than one-third of the survey respondents were more than the age of 60. Information from the 2010 Census shows that over 15 percent of the population in Avondale Estates is in this age category. Planning now for an aging population will help ensure that residents can remain in the city and safely age in place.

**Mobility and Accessibility** – Lifelong mobility and accessibility provide access and transportation, including walking, to people of all ages and abilities.

- » 96 percent feel that crossable, safe streets are important or very important in Avondale Estates.
- » 94 percent of Avondale Estates respondents feel that adequate lighting for safe walking is important or very important.

Survey comments frequently included requests for sidewalks throughout all of Avondale Estates, better street lighting and improved pedestrian access to the business district and the Avondale MARTA station. Many commenters mentioned needing traffic calming measures through the neighborhood, but did not want speed bumps installed.



*“Crossing our busy downtown street is still unnerving. Drivers aren’t paying attention, especially across from Skip’s Hot Dogs and at the Tudor Village.”*

*“Making things pedestrian-friendly means both increasing the ease of walking but also dramatically increasing the variety of options available to non-drivers. From trolleys to bikes to Segway paths, the more options the better.”*



**Diversity in Housing** - Lifelong Communities offer multiple housing options at various price points to allow people to remain in their communities as their needs change.

- » 67 percent consider as “important” or “very important” flexible housing accommodations that provide living options for older family members or adult children.
- » 76 percent consider as “important” or “very important” the ability to modify existing homes with handicapped accessible features.
- » An average of 33 percent feel age-specific housing, such as apartments or condos for those over age 55, were “somewhat important.”

In the comment section, respondents expressed concerns about having apartments or other high-density housing added to the community, although many said that having different housing options, especially for those seeking to downsize, was important.

*“Personally, I don’t like to see people segregated by age. Housing that encourages multi-generation living and mingling will be important to us.”*

*“I’m not sure what we will do when we need to downsize. Most important to us will be a quality of life that does not require us to get into traffic. Can we walk to a grocery, coffee shop, gift shop, nice restaurant?”*

**Opportunities for Social Interaction** – Community design can improve and foster opportunities for social interaction.

- » 64 percent say having places to gather, such as restaurants and shops, is “very important.”
- » 63 percent rate the availability of parks and playgrounds in the community as “very important.”
- » Avondale Estates residents also place strong value on community celebrations and festivals; 85 percent rate them as “important” or “very important.”

The majority of comments from this section encouraged the growth and redevelopment of the downtown area. There was also much praise for the many community events offered in Avondale Estates.



*“One of the reasons we moved to this area was because of the events that promote community spirit. It has a positive effect.”*

*“I love the idea of having a weekly community farmer’s market and/or community garden in Avondale Estates and believe they would be very beneficial to aging in place so I considered ranking them very important. But having Your DeKalb Farmers Market nearby does ease that need so I’d place that need behind some of the others.”*



**Opportunities for Healthy Living** – Getting healthy and staying healthy is essential to maintaining a high quality of life. Community design must provide basic and preventative healthcare and encourage physical activity.

- » 94 percent rate walkable destinations as “important” or “very important.”
- » 82 percent say having a town square or main street is “important” or “very important.”
- » 84.7 percent rank the need for grocery stores as “important” or “very important.”

Nearly all responses in this section referenced the need for the city to have a grocery store, ideally within walking distance. Many comments said the DeKalb Farmer’s Market was an important asset to the neighborhood and frequently patronized by residents.

*“Avondale has no grocery store, pharmacy or gym. Being able to find essentials without having to go to Decatur or down Memorial Drive would be a huge lift to the community.”*

*“I had hoped I would be able to walk to my grocery store as I grew older and drove my car less, but in Avondale this is not possible.”*

**Access to Services** – *Lifelong communities provides access to a full range of basic and supportive services.*

- » An average of 57 percent say having access to parks, schools, restaurants and grocery stores is “most important.”
- » 63 percent say a wellness facility would be “important” or “very important.”

Most residents commented that hospitals, physicians and medical offices were located in nearby communities and easily accessible from Avondale Estates. Several respondents felt that having a strong school system would greatly enhance the neighborhood.

*“Affordable wellness activities within walking distance for all ages are a very, very important part of the Lifelong Community. A wellness club with exercise rooms and affordable classes or drop-ins for yoga, Pilates, rumba, Tai Chi, etc., are important. Pool activities like water aerobics and lap swimming are needed, too.”*

## **Additional Thoughts from Avondale Estates Residents**

*“I would love to see some great ideas come from this that could impact our city. Love being here in Avondale, and the thought of aging here is pretty intriguing!”*

*“I think that we have lost the importance of mixed neighborhoods. Too often the elderly are forced to move due to the tax burden or the difficulty of maintaining their single-family dwelling.”*

*“It is very comforting to me and my husband to know that the City of Avondale is trying to work out plans for elders, so that their last days can be as friendly and good as possible.”*

## **Lifelong Community Initiatives**

- » Walkability expert Dan Burden, from the Walkable and Livable Communities Institute, is scheduled to do an assessment of sidewalks and crosswalks on March 11, 2013.
- » ARC will review Avondale’s zoning and housing codes and identify ways to update them to support Lifelong Community projects.
- » The City will stripe and improve two crosswalks along Highway 278 this summer. Following completion of the work, the City will host a community event to celebrate the improvements.
- » ARC will host health and wellness programs to connect community members with needed services, including SPARC (Sickness Prevention Achieved through Regional Collaboration) and a Chronic Disease Self-Management Program. ARC will host the events in the spring.
- » ARC and Avondale Estates stakeholders will collaborate on additional health and wellness education programs for residents.



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