



Living Well in North Yarmouth An Age-Friendly Community

Progress Report 2023

In the Beginning . . .

In late 2016, the committee of town residents, that came to be known as Living Well in North Yarmouth, was organized at the request of the Select Board and the Town Manager.

The original charge, given by the Select Board, was to look at so-called “aging in place” resources for town residents.

After the committee met with AARP and joined their initiative to become an “Age-Friendly Community”, the LWNy group broadened the scope of the original charge to embrace all people in town. This change was also supported by town leaders. Living Well in North Yarmouth recognized that accessible sidewalks benefited people of all ages, for example, that living well in a community has no age requirement or limitations. We used the W.H.O.’s 8 Domains of Livability as our guide (*see addendum one*).

We decided to conduct a survey ([link](#)), which was financially supported by our town government and mailed to all residents. Over 500 residents responded! The survey demonstrated that townspeople loved their North Yarmouth and felt comfortable and safe here. No extraordinary needs were identified and in fact, the survey pointed to the safety net of family, neighbors, friends, and church the community used to help those in need. This durable net has been in place for many years, if not generations (*see addendum two*).

We also invited town officials—town manager, the FireRescue chief, the director of public works and the town clerk—to meet with us. We wanted to learn what they knew about our town and needs that they saw as unmet. Those meetings led to the creation of partnerships. For example, the FireRescue Chief applied for, and was given, an AARP Challenge grant that provided keyless entry systems, called Knox-Boxes, in time of emergency for vulnerable residents. In turn, he and his crew staff a fund-raising concession stand at the annual Kite Festival. The town clerk helped publish our print newsletter. Public Works crew moved many a table for Kite Festival! And Story-Walk would not have happened without Public Works.

In the beginning, in the same spirit of learning, we met with public health and social service officials as well as leaders of faith communities. We reached out and met with other town committees where we hoped project partnerships would evolve. And they did. The Congregational Church sells sweets at the Kite Festival! And the Historical Society brings cider and lemonade. We partnered with the Veterans Association to host wintertime cribbage tournaments.



Tom Hinman, longtime resident, plays cribbage at the wintertime tournament with townspeople of all ages.

As a result of our research and listening in the community, we wrote:

Mission Statement **2018**

The Living Well in North Yarmouth committee will assess community needs, catalog available services, and inventory the town for its assets regarding issues of aging. The committee will work to develop and implement strategies to respond to the needs/desires expressed by the townspeople.

Who We Are

Our committee includes businesspeople, educators, nurses, engineers, mental health professionals, school administrators and communication professionals. We even have a professional musician! This diversity is a major strength and enables us to pursue disparate projects. By encouraging members to engage with “pet” projects, enthusiasm and commitment remain strong. Illness, relocation, and other facts of life have caused some turnover but five of the original eight members remain involved. New members have invited themselves (always a compliment!) or have been personally recruited. There is also a group of volunteers (including the former chair of the Select Board who brought us together originally) available to support annual projects, such as the Ice Cream Social and the Kite Festival.

We call them honorary members.



LWNY members Gay Peterson, Ginny VanDyke and Diane Morrison welcome all to the Ice Cream Social.

Pride in Our Work

Strong municipal support enabled us to achieve much. At our beginning, the Select Board, especially the Chair, and our Town Manager supported us financially and as importantly, spiritually. All agreed on our mission and the strategies we planned to use to fulfill it.

We are organized in 8 Domains (*see addendum one*). Programs and project with partnerships and of, course, outcomes are listed therein.

In the survey, people responded strongly when asked about town communications. They wanted more and better. As a result, we volunteered to help the assistant town manager to produce a bi-monthly printed, mailed newsletter ([link](#)). Production of this newsletter continued until spring, 2022. It was assigned to a paid staff member at that time.

Ice Cream Social

We also sponsored, beginning in 2017, an Ice Cream Social on the evening before Town Meeting in April. We partnered with a local ice cream shop, invited musicians (The North Yarmouth Troubadours) and Jack the Juggler. At the end of a long winter, people were happy to reunite. This popular event was interrupted by the pandemic but resumed in 2022.



1st Greeter

1st Greeter ([link](#)) was inspired by a member of our committee who was rather new to town. He had experienced a “Welcome Wagon” program in another town and wondered if North Yarmouth could do something to welcome new residents. He called it 1st Greeter and it was a lovely idea.

This was organized and managed by one of us and we have greeted over 200 new families to town. Trained volunteers reach out to newcomers and ask to meet them and their families. They are offered a “bling bag” which is filled with information (When is my trash picked up?) about the town, maps of our parks and a few small gifts. A sweet treat often arrives, as well.

Most people welcome this but, if they are uncomfortable, volunteers offer to leave the bag outside and/or meet up by phone or video chat. This was the preferred delivery method during the pandemic.

1st Greeter continues to be a popular program of Living Well in North Yarmouth in 2023.

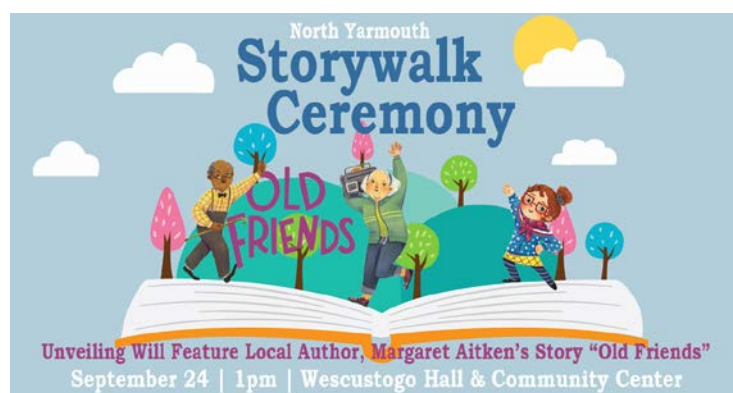
Kite Festival

Early in our existence, because townspeople had asked for more social opportunities, we produced the 1st Kite Festival, and it was a huge hit. We had music, kite-making, face-painting by local resident, Gail Strattard, Jack the Juggler, bubbles, kite flying and food, course. The Nor'east Kite Club brought big kites and wowed the crowd. The pandemic caused us to miss two years, but in 2022, the Kite Fest returned!



StoryWalk

In 2021, a town resident reached out to us concerning the creation of a StoryWalk ([link](#)). This is a popular attraction in many New England towns. An easy-to-walk trail is chosen, and story boards are installed at regular intervals. Books for children aged 3-7 are laminated and installed, page by page on the boards. Parents and children take an easy hike through the woods, enjoying both nature and literature. We were delighted with her idea and, led by two members with interested grandchildren, Story Walk in North Yarmouth was opened to the public in September 2022. There has been a bit of organizational confusion, but the committee and the town are sorting through it. Although designed for some of our younger residents, Story-Walk also enables people of all ages to interact with nature, exercise and socialize with friends.



Our first story features local author Margaret Aitken's story, *Old Friends*. Margaret opened StoryWalk with her sons on September 24, 2022.

Kite in Sight? Please Slow Down

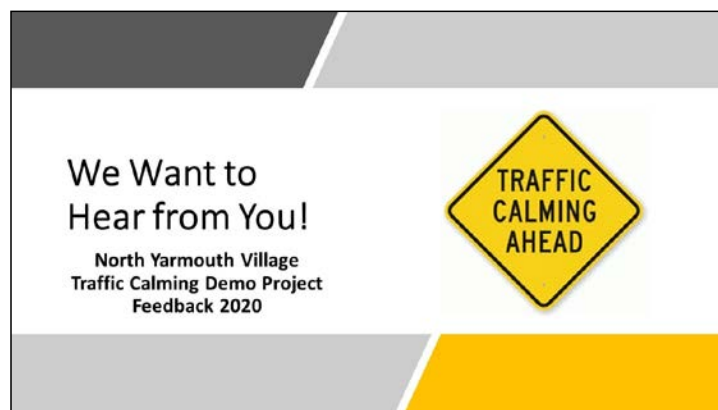
On a more serious note, because of excessive speed in our town and the many complaints about it, we partnered with the town planner and the Economic Development and Sustainability Committee to create a temporary test program designed to slow traffic down. The Bicycle Coalition of Maine partnered with us. The Maine Department of Transportation helped with this project, as well. Because the Kite Festival was so popular, we decided to use its brand to politely ask drivers to SLOW DOWN. The banner was installed in the Village Center and kites were hung all over town!



Steve Palmer, Chair of Living Well in North Yarmouth



Temporary traffic calming measures were installed. The program had a great response and when a town forum was held to discuss permanent traffic calming strategies, nearly 70 residents showed to express their support. The outcome was financial support. For the last three budget cycles, the town has voted to support permanent traffic calming installations and equipment. New crosswalks have been installed, as well as traffic signals. According to public safety officials, traffic has, indeed, slowed down, when measured by our radar speed monitors. The first project was in the Village Center and has now expanded to other sections of town. In 2023, more street improvements will be installed.



On-Going Programs

We continue to serve as resources in the community and are available when needed. For example, we made wellness calls and food/medicine deliveries at the beginning of the pandemic. Local officials know to call upon us for such support. We collaborate with other committees, such as the Parks Committee, on projects of mutual interest. In 2021, we conducted another well-received survey concerning recreational opportunities ([link](#)). The responses will help guide town officials going forward.

Our 9-person group is quite diverse, yet, we have a synergy that allows us to work well together. Our diversity allows us to explore interests that we might not always explore—for example, two of us have been working for the past three years to install a handicapped-accessible boat ramp to the Royal River in collaboration with the Royal River Conservation Trust. We were awarded a generous grant by the RRCT in support of this project. The Maine Department of Environmental Protection has been involved, of course. One of us is also working with the Casco Bay Trail Alliance. Collaborations with other groups enriches our work, we think.



Public Works Director, Clark Baston and Steve Palmer, Chair of LWNy, check out the radar speed monitor.

What's Next?

Events of the last year have clearly indicated a shift in government philosophy with the hiring of a new town manager in late winter, 2022. A new community center director and assistant director were hired last summer, 2022. At our local library, a community librarian was appointed. Additionally, the Cumberland-North Yarmouth Recreation Program has always been very active.

These paid staff people have assumed responsibilities that have overlapped with projects and programs that we and other volunteer committees have done in the past. In August 2022, the newsletter that we helped produced was assigned to the community center director, for example. Liability issues affected the installation of StoryWalk and the production of the Kite Festival. These issues also affected morale on our committee. We requested, through our liaison to the Select Board, a review of our charge. There has been no response, to date.

In 2016, when we started, most Age-Friendly initiatives were volunteer-driven with committees holding bake sales and other fund-raisers to finance programming. Fast forward to 2023 and the Maine Age-Friendly/Lifelong Communities landscape has changed considerably. It is now populated with many towns using paid staff to fulfill goals and implement programs. This is a remarkable accomplishment – volunteer committees

have demonstrated community needs and some ways to address them. Towns and cities have responded by hiring people to do just that.

At this point in the lifespan of Living Well in North Yarmouth, we are somewhat dormant, waiting for the Select Board to advise a direction.



Steve Palmer and Al Ahlers, founding LWN members, work to improve Baston Park.



L-R, Lori Parham, AARP, Steve Palmer, Living Well in North Yarmouth, Governor Janet Mills, FireRescue Chief Greg Payson and Town Manager Rosemary Roy celebrate Maine entering the Statewide Network of Lifelong Communities with a ceremony at the new Westcustogo Hall and North Yarmouth Community Center

Make It Happen!

In small towns and cities alike, volunteers are the people who perform vital and important work to make our society a better place for all to live and thrive.

In North Yarmouth, volunteers were or are involved with:

- Writing the Comprehensive Plan that sets the town's path for the next decade.
- Researching and developing a plan to establish TIF districts that will provide a means toward economic development and save taxpayers money.
- Reviewing and approving all housing and business building proposals before they are permitted.
- Developing the town budget of \$2.7M.
- Researching and drafting new zoning ordinances and land use regulations.
- Working to improve the connectivity of town trails and maintaining town parks.
- Planning for the town's annual celebration Fun Day in September.
- Providing transportation for folks in town.
- Sponsoring suppers and other events for the benefit of the FireRescue Department.
- Planning for the annual Kite Festival in October.
- Planning for the annual Tree Lighting in December.
- Putting up, maintaining, and taking down US flags along main town roadways.
- Producing the bi-monthly town newsletter.
- Welcoming new residents to town with the 1st Greeter program.

Some of these activities ask for a commitment to monthly meetings. Some ask for a commitment of one day or part of a day. These activities create the fabric of life in North Yarmouth.

And volunteers made them happen!



Cribbage — a serious business for all!



Living Well in North Yarmouth An Age-Friendly Community

Our Members

Al Ahlers • Ann Dillon • Peg Leonard • Peter Lindsay
Diane Morrison • Donna Palmer • Steve Palmer
Gay Peterson • Ginny VanDyke

Addendum One

Programs and Projects by Domain

Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

Action(s) completed	Partners	Outcome
Produced Kite Festival	FireRescue Company NY Historical Society NY Congregational Church	Annual event
Produced Winter Snow Day	Parks Committee	One time
Conducted 2021 Recreation Survey	Municipality	One time
Kite in Sight Traffic Calming Initiative	Municipality Town Planner Economic Development Committee Bicycle Coalition of Maine	Permanent safety measures
Installed StoryWalk	Municipality Business support	One time
Create an accessible boat launch	Royal River Conservation Trust Maine DEP Municipality	Ongoing

Communication and Information

Action(s) completed	Partners	Outcome
Published a printed, mailed newsletter	Municipality	Taken over by municipality
Hosted informational meetings	Municipality	As needed
Created (and used) social media platforms	Municipality	As needed
Produced electronic Resource Guide	Communications Committee Municipality	Scheduled updates
Created page on town website	Municipality	Taken over by municipality

Social Participation

Action(s) completed	Partners	Outcome
Produced Ice Cream Social	Volunteers Business support	Annual event
Produced Kite Festival	FireRescue Company NY Historical Society NY Congregational Church	Annual event
Sponsored winter cribbage tourney	Veterans Association	Victim of Covid
Sponsored ping pong		Victim of Covid
Sponsored Fun Day activities	NY Events Committee	Victim of Covid
Sponsored pickleball	NY Community Center	Taken over by municipality
Won AARP Challenge Grant for KnoxBoxes	FireRescue Chief	One time
Managed Fitness Center		Discontinued

Housing

Action(s) completed	Partners	Outcome
Support ADU policy		Wrote two letters

Respect and Social Inclusion

Action(s) completed	Partners	Outcome
Organized 1st Greeter program	Municipality	Ongoing

Civic Participation and Employment

Action(s) completed	Partners	Outcome
Recruited 127 new volunteers		One time
Managed volunteer list		Taken over by municipality
Supported daytime informational meetings		Discontinued

Transportation

Action(s) completed	Partners	Outcome
Organized volunteer transportation program		Ongoing, as needed

Community Support and Health Services

Action(s) completed	Partners	Outcome
Managed Fitness Center		Discontinued
Sponsored ping pong		Victim of Covid
Sponsored pickleball	NY Community Center	Taken over by municipality
Conducted wellness checks during Covid	FireRescue Chief	Discontinued
Delivered food and medicine during Covid	FireRescue Chief	Discontinued
Won AARP Challenge Grant for KnoxBoxes	FireRescue Chief	One time
Distributed winter care bags	Mormon Church	One time

Addendum Two

2017 Resident Survey Results

North Yarmouth

Who We Are Today and Into the Future

When the Living Well in North Yarmouth committee was organized in late 2016, members immediately set to work designing a survey which would allow them insight into how residents of all ages viewed their lives in their town. This is the report of the responses.

When the results began to arrive, we were a bit surprised by the homogeneity found in the responses. This transcended age and gender. People are content with their lives here. 91% said that they feel respected and included. This, too, transcended age or gender.

“We love North Yarmouth” was a comment added to many of the surveys.

North Yarmouth has a stable population (65.6% have lived in town longer than 12 years) who value both the town itself and the rural lifestyle it affords them. Of the 502 responses received, economic security was a major theme: 96% own their home and 88.4% say it’s ideal for them now.

Only 3% indicated any problem with heating their homes and these were due, in large part, to home maintenance issues. 98.5% have a car and require no help with transportation (this is nearly identical to the number who intend to drive until they are unable to do so).

Food security appears to be non-issue, as only 4 respondents said that they used the food pantry. None reported that they did not have enough food. This may also correlate to the 89% who report that they need no services at this time.

The survey also illustrated the social inclusion residents of North Yarmouth experience. 36.5% are involved (or would be) in town life. In comments, other people said that they would like to be involved were it not for career and family obligations.

This being said, 81% are as social as they want to be and some who answered that they were not as social as they wanted, took responsibility saying that they had not reached out, or tried to be more social. The 56.5% who volunteer is another indicator of social inclusion and feelings of connectivity.

Over 33% said that they volunteered through a faith-based community. This may point to the informal social network that provides care to those who need it through the faith-based communities. When 52.5% said that they helped “informally,” we thought this might indicate old-fashioned neighborliness or family support (the number of family helping family was quite high – over 77% said that they would spend time with “family and friends” as they look forward. We inferred that this could also mean helping relatives when needed.

The town government communicates with its citizens quite well, as over 89% said that it was easy or fairly easy to learn of town events. Over 50% utilized the town website (contradicting the myth that seniors are not tech-savvy). As a counter-balance, nearly 55% read newspaper and use that media to learn of town news. In the early on-line survey response, 36% of those over age 61 used this option.

We asked about utilization of town parks and recreation areas – 73% said that they used these amenities. On the other side of this, 45% complained of poor (or non-existent) sidewalks. This was a prevailing theme of the proffered comments. Thus, it is not surprising when nearly 73% said that they took walks in town and over 42% said that they exercised and/or took part in sport activities. Bike paths were also mentioned.

The ancient theme: taxes are too high and forcing people out of their homes was found, in one form or another, in 42 comments. Excessive school spending was usually cited as the cause. It was revealing that only one respondent complained of excessive municipal spending, indicating that residents are content with town budgets.

As we expected, the open-ended comment section of the survey provided residents the opportunity to tell us what they thought we should know and so they did.

Options to downsize are limited, as is affordable or subsidized housing.

A community center at the old school site is needed and wanted – including a skate park – a community place to gather

Some respondents were critical of the current town offices.

Some spoke of the inability of the town to move forward on the Wescustogo project.

Property tax assistance for seniors was mentioned by many people (coincidentally, this was put in place in 2017).

More social activities for all – co-mingling the age groups – is desired.

Could we have?

- 12 month installment property tax payment plan (this is already in place)
- Self-improvement classes at the closed school
- Movies there, too
- And a playground
- Sidewalks on Route 9
- More business in the village center
- Respite care
- Town bulletin board at the site of old Wescustogo Hall
- Free trash bags for seniors
- A town-sponsored program to match volunteers to the people who need them
- Curbside pickup for large items and brush
- Small food market

SUMMARY

We want to thank all who took the time to help us learn about our town. It has provided us with fascinating insights and renewed affection for our neighbors. The survey yielded unexpected information and insights into the heart of our town.

Of the 1400 paper surveys mailed to residents, 425 were returned (28%). The remainder, 85, were completed online. A total of 510 residents responded.

This, by any standard, is an extraordinary rate of return. Many respondents took the time to thank us “for asking,” for “being concerned for my welfare.” It may well be that the survey itself was perceived as another reason to feel safe and happy here.

North Yarmouth people of all ages are quite independent, as demonstrated by the exceptionally high rates of home and vehicle ownership, the apparent economic security these represent, and the expressed contentment with their lives – conclusions drawn from several questions relating to these issues. To move to this community – with no public transportation, no supermarket, no bank – essentially, nothing to allow residents an unencumbered lifestyle, speaks to this independence. They can afford to live here and pay for the means to get them to an appointment in Brunswick or Portland.

Does this mean that there are no persons needing help in this community? Of course not. However, it appears that neighbors and near-by family are helping these people informally. The North Yarmouth Fire Rescue service, as well as the Code Enforcement Officer, are also watching over our residents. So are the faith-based communities and the schools. These informal care-giving/care-providing arrangements are time-honored in civilized societies.

Does this mean that the community has any work to do to ensure that no one is misplaced in the busy-ness of life? If the basic services are in place, what could/should the town do to enhance quality of life for all? Should our taxes provide added curbside pickup (large items, brush), added sidewalks, and free trash bags for seniors?

These are questions for us to address now – and to routinely discuss in the years forward.

For now, the survey certainly indicated that people would like to see more social activities locally, as well as appropriate small-scale housing to enable those who love North Yarmouth to stay here if or when it is time to downsize.

42 respondents reported the desire/need for senior property tax assistance. The creation of a community center was noted by respondents of all ages, while many asked for a conclusion to the drawn-out issue of rebuilding Wescustogo Hall. Younger residents, saying that the “elders” resisted change and new ideas, expressed this sentiment. These younger residents are in the town but not of the town and thus, are uninvolved.

Can this be changed?