



A chance to speak out about ‘successful aging’

By Ellen Waldman

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I once read a quote that said, “Everyone needs a good listening to.” I heartily agree with that sentiment, and Southern Oregon is going to be part of AARP Oregon’s “Age-Friendly Oregon: Building Communities for All Ages Listening Tour.” Here are some details from their flyer: AARP Oregon is kicking off a statewide listening tour to hear from Oregonians 50-plus, about their communities, their priorities and aspirations for a livable and age-friendly Oregon.

When: Noon to 2 p.m. Saturday, April 7 (check in and lunch starts at 11:30 a.m.)

Where: Jackson County Library, 205 S Central Ave, Medford, OR 97501

RSVP: Go to aarp.cvent.com/MedfordAgeFriendly2018 or call 877-926-8300 to register for this free event.

They want you to have a voice in creating livable communities for all ages and abilities. Some examples of this can include your ideas about getting around without a car (I keep thinking that something like “Uber Elder” would be great); finding the support services you need; and the ability to continue to work and volunteer in your community. They will then share what they hear with the Governor’s Commission on Senior Services, and both state and local decision-makers.

I spoke to Bandana Shrestha, AARP director of community engagement, for more insight into how these listening sessions will inform changes. She described how, after the tour, they will collect all information and ideas from each of the 12 communities they visit. She assured me that the volunteer-led local panels really do want to hear from people.

She said there is often the misperception that aging adults’ needs are already being handled. The plan is to create better models for communities to support this population. They need your input on your vision for our community, and the impediments and solutions to aging successfully in them. It will also inform AARP policies and directions on issues which are the real priorities in Oregon for the next three years.

Here’s some more data. Nearly 90 percent of Americans who are 65 or older, and 71 percent of those between the ages of 50 and 64, would like to stay in their home or community as they get older, according to a 2014 report from the AARP Public Policy Institute. Older people’s success at reaching this goal depends on several factors, including their ability to get to the stores and medical care they use, either by walking or using public transportation.

In addition to the needs outside of the home, only 3.2 percent of the state’s housing units are equipped with an entry-level bedroom and bathroom, wide hallways and other features that make them accessible to people with limited mobility, according to the AARP Livability Index. The state is currently struggling with an affordable housing crisis. The average Oregonian is already spending 21.4 percent of their income on housing costs, according to the index, which means they have little left over to do the upgrades needed to age-in-place.

Think about what's important to you and what you would like your state and local decision-makers to hear. The list of issues that might be developed from these listening sessions could be quite extensive. From aging-in-place housing, to transportation options for those no longer driving, to healthy meals and entertainment, please come and share your thoughts. Other ideas you might consider advocating for are intergenerational parks (the only one in the state is being built right now in Central Point); real food delivery and/or preparation services; and more effective street lighting and signage.

They have said your voice matters, and they're listening. That says a lot.