

## Carbondale Age-Friendly Community Initiative (CAFCI)

### Summary 2019 Results

On January 26, 2019, a group of Carbondale senior residents gathered to explore how we might create a grassroots effort to engage with the Town of Carbondale and eventually join the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities. Our goal was to be visible, vocal, and contributing in all aspects of the town's civic and social life. And thus, CAFCI, an *ad hoc* caucus of citizens, acting as the steering committee, was born.

In the winter of 2019, mobility emerged as a significant issue for Carbondale's governing body, the Board of Trustees (BOT). Over one week, CAFCI conducted an informal survey of 186 residents, including 26 from staff and residents of Heritage Park Assisted Living. We learned that many residents (not only seniors) reported that some sidewalks and trails around town were difficult to navigate, not only for those with walkers, wheelchairs, and canes, but also for young mothers pushing children in strollers. All 186 people we surveyed signed a petition asking the BOT to work with Carbondale seniors to actively pursue strategies that enhance mobility for people of all ages.

CAFCI and several other Carbondale residents attended the February 19 BOT working session on mobility. We presented the petition and identified five priority mobility issues:

1. Sidewalk clearance, encroachment, and interference.
2. Bike, pedestrian, and auto conflicts.
3. Lack of accessible benches along trails.
4. Unsafe intersections.
5. Lack of transportation outside the downtown core.

The BOT was very receptive to our concerns. Since then, we have developed an excellent collaborative working relationship with the BOT and are pleased to highlight our accomplishments in 2019:

1. Completed the application to become a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities and presented it to the BOT. The BOT unanimously approved it and submitted it to AARP. In July Carbondale became the 13<sup>th</sup> community in Colorado to be accepted into the network.
2. Researched senior programs available to Carbondale residents and created a "For Seniors" link on the Town of Carbondale's website ( [https://www.carbondalegov.org/residents/for\\_seniors.php](https://www.carbondalegov.org/residents/for_seniors.php)).

3. Created the Age-Friendly Carbondale website (<https://agefriendlycarbondale.org/>).
4. Partnered with Senior Matters, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation dedicated to the improvement of the quality of life for seniors in Carbondale and the surrounding communities of the Roaring Fork and Crystal River valleys. Senior Matters acts as CAFCI's fiscal agent.
5. Responded to a request from a blind resident who was having difficulty crossing the intersection of Village Road and Highway 133, CAFCI learned that when pedestrian signals exist at a crossing, the retrofitting of an Accessible Pedestrian Signal (APS) device will automatically be approved if the person requesting the APS is blind or has a visual impairment and regularly uses the crossing.

CAFCI completed the APS request form, contacted the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) office in Grand Junction, and made an appointment with a CDOT representative and a CDOT engineer to meet CAFCI volunteers at the designated intersection. In preparation for this meeting, we asked Darryl Fuller, outgoing chair of the Bike Pedestrian and Trails Commission (BPT), to summarize the safety issues at the intersections between the highway 133/82 interchange going south through town to Snowmass Drive. This summary was presented in a letter from CAFCI to the CDOT representative at our meeting on April 23, 2019. CDOT increased the amount of time on both the audible and visual signals. However, we did not receive a response to our letter from CDOT.

At an AARP Conference on August 21st in Breckenridge, Rebecca White, Director of the CDOT Division of Transportation Development, gave a presentation on rural transportation issues and spoke about specific issues of highways intersecting residential neighborhoods. Niki Delson, CAFCI Co-Chair, spoke with her and shared CAFCI's multiple concerns about dangerous intersections in Carbondale. Ms. White suggested having the letter come directly from the town rather than CAFCI.

The letter (including summary) was brought before the BPT on November 4 and was unanimously approved. The BPT recommended that the BOT send the letter (including summary) to CDOT. This was unanimously approved by the BOT on December 10 and mailed shortly thereafter.

6. Discussed mobility Issues with staff and residents of Heritage Park. Residents like to walk along the Ditch Trail that runs behind the property, from Surrey Road to Cowen Drive. However, there are no accessible benches along this trail.

CAFCI worked with the staff and residents of Heritage Park and the Carbondale Departments of Public Works and Parks and Recreation, with the following results:

- a. Determined a suitable location for a fully accessible, outdoor conversational space.
  - b. Consulted with a physical therapist about a design that would not only be American Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible but would also encourage maximum social engagement.
  - c. Obtained an easement from Life Care Centers (owner of the assisted living property) that allows the town to install the benches.
  - d. Received two generous donations for the purchase of age-friendly benches. The benches have been received, and the Department of Public Works will lay the cement pad and install the benches in the spring.
7. Learned that the Ditch Trail behind Heritage Park and continuing to Cowen Drive ends at an incomplete sidewalk. There are 250 feet remaining to complete this sidewalk where it intersects with the sidewalk on 133.

We consulted with the funding representative of NextFifty (a grantor organization) to ascertain whether this project would fall within its grant guidelines. Upon determining that it did, Kevin Schorzman, Carbondale's Director of Public Works, estimated that the project would cost \$25,000. He agreed that the town would be the fiscal manager and would write the budget if CAFCI would write the grant. The next grant cycle opens in January 2020.

8. Performed walk audits of all Carbondale Priority Corridors (CPCs) designated by the BPT.
- a. One of the CPCs is the Rio Grande Trail from Snowmass Drive to 133. There are no ADA-accessible benches along the ARTway portion of the trail. We followed up by walking this section with Brett Meredith of the Roaring Fork Transit Authority (RFTA) and Amy Kimberly of Carbondale Arts. We discussed options for artist-created ADA-accessible benches. We then met with Mike Hermes (RFTA), who advised us that artist-created benches were not feasible owing to the high cost of maintenance. However, he said that in spring or early summer 2020, RFTA would install two ADA-accessible benches and resurface the adjacent landscaping so they could be accessed by individuals whose mobility is compromised.
  - b. After completing all walk audits, CAFCI determined that the corridor needing immediate attention was 8<sup>th</sup> Street, from Village Road to Main Street. This section of the corridor presents a multitude of issues: it is heavily trafficked; vehicles, including trucks that often exceed the speed limit, use the area to cut through town; children and adults on bikes and on foot use the corridor to access the Rio Grande trail; sidewalks are discontinuous and very narrow in places; many residents do not shovel sidewalks or cut back

overhanging branches and have other landscaping issues that obstruct pedestrian traffic.

CAFCl presented a detailed audit of the 8<sup>th</sup> Street corridor to the BPT on September 9. The BPT agreed that this corridor was a priority for the town and sent a recommendation to the BOT for action. The BOT approved \$90,000 in the 2020 capital improvements budget to be used to address the issues identified.

9. Responded to concerns of residents regarding bike-pedestrian auto conflicts on sidewalks, trails, and streets:

- a. Near New Rebekah Lodge Thrift Store and Senior Matters jointly donated \$700 for the purchase of bicycle bells, which were generously purchased at cost from Aloha Cyclery. CAFCl obtained copies of CDOT's *Colorado Rules of the Road*. These were given out along with 200 bicycle bells at three Carbondale events. Additionally, children and adults were engaged in conversation about bicycle etiquette and safe cycling while the bells were installed on their bikes.
- b. Residents at Heritage Park asked if we would install bells on their walkers and wheelchairs. Three CAFCl volunteers installed 15 bells.

10. Held bi-monthly meetings of the steering committee, developed an email list of individuals interested in CAFCl activities, was featured on community radio and in the community newspaper, and educated residents at every opportunity about our goals.

11. Forged relationships with local organizations and municipal government:

Met with

- a. The Carbondale Mayor and several Trustees; BPT and Parks and Recreation Commission.
- b. Rotary; Rebekah Lodge; Heritage Park Assisted Living; Sopris Lodge Senior Living Community; Carbondale Arts; RFTA; Crystal Meadows Senior Housing.
- c. Directors of Public Works and Parks and Recreation Departments.
- d. Reporters from the *Sopris Sun* and *Post Independent*.
- e. Interviewed twice on KDNK Radio (Senior Matters)
- f. Chairpersons of Age-Friendly Pitkin and Eagle Counties.
- g. Garfield County Director of Senior Services.
- h. Garfield County Commissioners.

12. Attended three AARP conferences and were invited to present at two.
- 13 Organized and raised funds for the CAFCI Community Assembly held on November 21. The event brought together 160 Carbondale residents and 20 organizations representing services available to Carbondale residents. Featured speakers were Bob Murphy (Director of AARP Colorado), Carbondale Mayor Dan Richardson, John Hoffman (Chair of Senior Matters), and CAFCI leaders. Participants at the event completed surveys about what would make Carbondale even more age friendly.