

An Age-friendly Sooke: What We Can Do



Report on a dialogue between individuals, business and
service providers on
creating an Age-friendly Sooke

Sponsored by:
Sooke Economic Development Commission in partnership with
Sooke Harbour Chamber of Commerce
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“Grow old with me! The best is yet to be.” ~Robert Browning

What will it take to create a more age-friendly Sooke? That question was put to a group of Sooke residents, business owners and service providers in a day-long dialogue held on September 10, 2008, at the Sooke Community Hall.

The goal of the discussion was to look at various features in the community, and among businesses, to envision how Sooke can better accommodate residents and visitors who are experiencing aging. In short, what can businesses and service providers do, and what does the community need, to make it a better place to live, work, play and grow older?

There were 88 participants at the event, who were given the opportunity to speak and share their ideas. Feedback forms were also distributed so participants could record additional thoughts and comments on the ideas raised during the day, or other issues that concerned them.

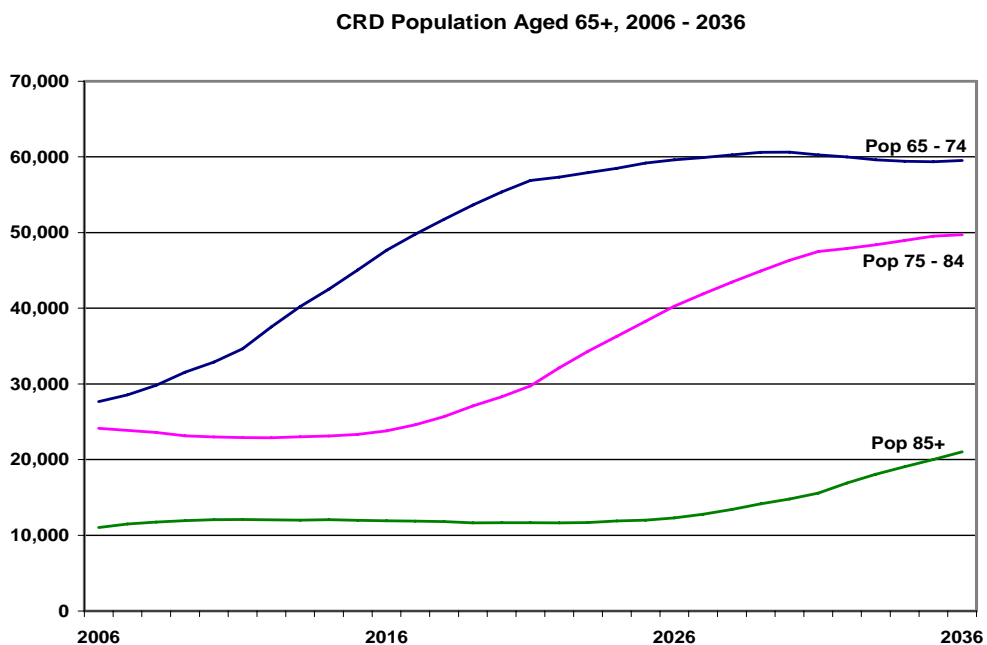
The event was an initiative of the Sooke Economic Development Commission (SEDC) in partnership with Sooke Harbour Chamber of Commerce (the Chamber). The day began with a welcome from Mayor Janet Evans, who outlined how the District of Sooke Council has focused on putting the infrastructure in place to create the conditions for future prosperity.



Sooke is already attractive in many ways for all ages, but there's more we can do.

Councillor Rick Kasper, chair of the SEDC, described the many features of Sooke which already make it attractive to older residents and visitors.

This event fit the mandate of the SEDC because bringing service providers and businesses together to hear from older people about services and products they want and need helps promote economic development in Sooke, and makes it a better place for people of all ages. Unlike many areas in B.C. and Canada, Sooke is still a growing community attracting many young families. But the community will continue to have more and more older people making up a higher proportion of the population in the very near future.



Planning, whether by the municipality, a business or a service provider, needs to take this changing makeup of the population, who are the customers and clients, into consideration. Sooke is an attractive community for all ages, and businesses and service providers are already doing many things right in recognizing and serving the needs of older people in Sooke.

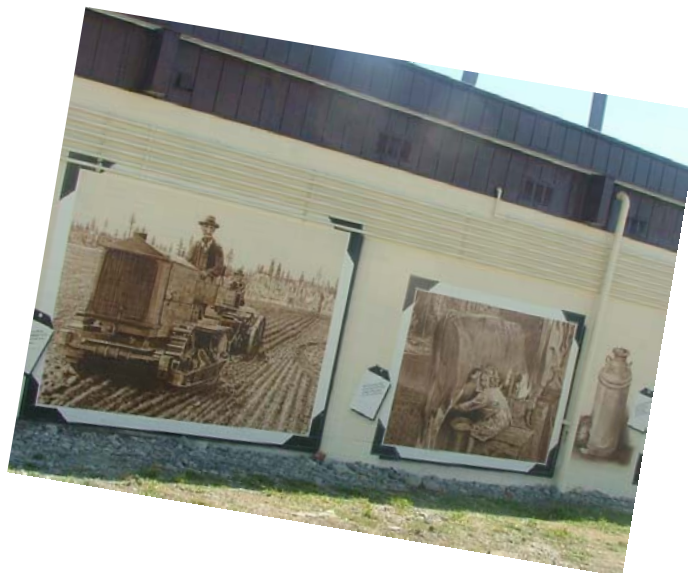
As examples, many people who grew up in Sooke have chosen to stay, raise their families and retire. Many others pick Sooke as a place to retire to from other parts of Canada and the world. The mild climate and welcoming geography appeal to visitors and residents. There are many parks and trails that are both beautiful and accessible so people can enjoy outdoor activities year round.

The thriving Sooke Seniors activity centre, the accessible pool and SEAPARC recreation centre, Ayre Manor multi-level seniors housing and care centre, and the Royal Canadian Legion are examples of what is in place providing housing, activities and care.

The Sooke Region Museum and other organizations such as the Sooke Community Association and Sooke Fall Fair work to preserve the community's culture, history and heritage, honouring and recognizing our older peoples' contributions to the community over the years.

Many local businesses and service providers have services tailored to seniors, such as discount shopping days.

However, there is more that can be done to build upon what is already in place in Sooke to create a truly age-friendly community in all ways.



What makes a community Age-friendly?

As pointed out by Winnie Yu, Manager of Healthy Environments in the provincial Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport, there are eight key features of an age-friendly community:

1. Outdoor spaces and public buildings that are pleasant, clean, secure and physically accessible.
2. Public transportation that is accessible and affordable.
3. Housing that is affordable, appropriately located, well built, well designed and secure.
4. Opportunities for social participation in leisure, social, cultural and spiritual activities with people of all ages and cultures.
5. Older people are treated with respect and are included in civic life.
6. Opportunities for employment and volunteerism that cater to older persons' interests and abilities.
7. Age-friendly communication and information available.
8. Community support and health services tailored to older persons' needs.

These features were included in the findings from two age-friendly initiatives, one by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the other by the Canadian Ministers Responsible for Seniors. As these reports point out, an age-friendly community is a community for all ages:

“Barrier-free buildings and streets enhance the mobility and independence of people with disabilities, young as well as old. Secure neighbourhoods allow children, younger women and older people to venture outside in confidence to participate in physically active leisure and in social activities. Families experience less stress when their older members have the community support and health services they need. The whole community benefits from the participation of older people in volunteer or paid work. Finally, the local economy profits from the patronage of older adult consumers.” *Global Age-Friendly Cities: A Guide* ~World Health Organization.

Older people as employees and customers

***“Age to me means nothing. I can't get old; I'm working.
I was old when I was twenty-one and out of work.
As long as you're working, you stay young.” ~George Burns***

Presentations from Rebecca George (Sooke Harbour Employment Services), John Farmer (Shoppers Drugs), and Todd Olynyk (Royal Bank) outlined several key issues with respect to older people as employees and customers.

Older people as employees have a lot to offer, and Sooke businesses who wish to hire older employees can benefit from the services of Sooke Harbour Employment Services and be eligible for incentives to hire older worker age 50-64. Older workers also benefit. One participant said the service helped to build confidence to help older workers reconnect with the workforce by “showing what your skills are and opening doors not previously opened to you.”

John Farmer pointed out that if a business shows it cares about senior customers, they will remain loyal. This includes knowing when to step in and offer help, and knowing when not to in order to respect dignity. It also means being aware that a senior may need you to do things a little bit slower, or their hearing might not be what it used to.

“There’s nothing finer than someone coming up and thanking you for the care you give.”
~John Farmer, Shopper’s Drugs.

Todd Olynyk from Royal Bank said he was there to listen, and participants from the audience had lots of ideas on how business in Sooke can be more age-friendly. They also pointed out that active seniors will readily go outside the community to shop if Sooke businesses don’t meet their needs.

Most of the comments were very positive about existing local businesses. “The shops in Sooke give excellent service – staff are friendly and helpful”. ~Participant.

Suggestions for Sooke businesses to be more age-friendly were:

- Reducing background noise in shops and restaurants. Background music, air conditioners, etc., provide additional noise that can make it difficult for older people to hear and enjoy their social situation.
- Having a local phone number, listed, and with a person available to answer. Many businesses use automated call systems which are confusing for many people. Local phone numbers for financial institutions are not listed and calls go to a central call centre. It was noted that Sooke businesses that have corporate head offices outside the community sometimes have little control in the way calls are answered.
- Providing chairs for line-ups so people are not forced to stand for periods of time.
- Having more parking spaces designated for people with disabilities.
- Having more toilets and facilities for people with disabilities.
- Providing space for walking sticks, hats, and coats (in restaurants).
- Having delivery service to more areas outside of the Sooke core.
- Providing ways for customers to give feedback (e.g. suggestion boxes at check out).
- Ensuring financial employees are trained to spot the signs of elder abuse.
- In restaurants, space tables so background noise from neighbouring tables does not interfere. Provide high back chairs and sunblinds. No drafts from doorways and windows.

Many participants were aware of the seniors' discount shopping days and appreciated these efforts to help them reduce costs, as it was noted that many seniors are on a fixed income.

Participants also suggested that business can keep Sooke products affordable for older people by:

- Having lower prices on fresh foods for seniors and people with low income to encourage healthier eating.
- Making sure sale items are on the shelf as it may be difficult for a senior to make a second trip.
- Having prices that are competitive to Langford.
- Offering case lot sales when government cheques are expected.

Participants felt more business should be attracted to Sooke. "Businesses should find out what healthy, active, financially secure seniors need and want and provide it locally" ~Participant. Two businesses that participants thought were needed in Sooke were low cost manual labour (e.g. help with cleaning gutters), and car and truck rental.

Services that are Age-friendly

"The older you get, the older you want to get." ~ Keith Richards

Services for citizens in Sooke are provided by publicly and privately funded organizations. Sooke has a strong and vibrant network of community services provided by active voluntary organizations. Public services in Sooke include the District of Sooke, SEAPARC Leisure Complex, schools, post office and RCMP.

Bonnie Sprinkling from the District of Sooke said the role of the municipality is to provide services such as roads and sewers, but also livability by addressing issues such as transportation, affordable housing, accessibility, inclusion and communication. Lorraine Brewster from SEAPARC outlined how recreation centres are adapting to new trends which show growing numbers of older people using the facilities and wanting services designed for their needs. Roberta McDonald from Edward Milne Community School talked about lifelong learning and opportunities for older people to take courses for fun, learning and social opportunities, but also to share their skills and knowledge.

Participants came up with ideas on these and other topics including community infrastructure, health and safety and security. Many of the following suggestions and topics could apply to public and community services and business as well.



Community infrastructure:

- New buildings going up in the community provide opportunities to create more accessibility.
- More benches along roads where people walk (Grant Road, town centre)
- More low cost seniors housing
- Provide a specific building to house all medical services.
- Create safer crosswalks.
- Create a town square with shelter and benches so people can meet and connect.
- Create more sidewalks and improve existing sidewalks to ensure they accommodate wheelchairs and scooters.
- Create community gardens that seniors can access.
- Fix areas of the road that are a hazard. One area cited was the intersection of Otter Point/Murray roads and Sooke Road which have deep dips in the pavement and uneven ground which is difficult to push the pedestrian button and could be a falling hazard. Of particular concern was the fact that this is the intersection closest to the seniors centre.
- Provide entrance doors that open automatically, or have push buttons to open.
- Create more public washrooms or porta-potties on walking routes and trails.
- Support and increase efforts to beautify Sooke.
- Provide better lighting.
- Create more paths so pedestrians don't have to walk along the highway.
- Provide better signage that is easy for older people to read (for washrooms, etc)
- Limit the number of stairs at the entrances to buildings.
- Allow granny houses on residential properties.

Safety and Security:

- Ensure older people are aware of emergency services - what they should do, and what is available. Sooke and Juan de Fuca electoral area need to work together, and there should be an emergency coordinator.
- Publicize Block watch more.
- Police should make people aware that after hours phones are answered outside of the community.

Health services:

- Cost of prescription drugs and amount of deductible people are eligible for from Pharmacare can sometimes be a hardship. Local pharmacies have information on where to call to spread out the deductible payments.
- Many people cited the difficulty in finding a local doctor and noted that Sooke needs to attract more doctors if people want to age in their community.
- A community health centre is needed.
- Geriatric specialist needed for Ayre Manor.
- "Our doctors are efficient, kind and friendly" ~Participant.



Men do not quit playing because they grow old; they grow old because they quit playing.
~Oliver Wendell Holmes

Active Aging:

- More programming at SEAPARC for older people.
- Fitness classes targeted to 55+ offered at Juan de Fuca Recreation Centre – several participants said they travel in regularly to attend and would like to see similar services offered in Sooke.
- Provide a swim lane for slower swimmers.
- Provide private change rooms.
- Install a weight room and machines at SEAPARC.
- Ensure Sooke has a golf course.
- Have more things for seniors to do in the community. This was not targeted to any specific agency, but is something all agencies could consider.
- "The Sooke Seniors Drop in centre is a great place" ~Participant.
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"The secret of staying young is to live honestly, eat slowly, and lie about your age."
~Lucille Ball

Lifelong Learning:

- Programs and courses at EMCS for adults need to be affordable. It was noted that free programming often doesn't work and that other ways, such as providing bursaries, could be explored.
- Explore concept of elder college – seniors teaching seniors. Offered during daytime hours at minimal cost.
- Expand CASA community garden as a teaching tool combined with other gardens.
- Singing is a great way to keep active.
- Provide training and courses on changes one experiences as they age.
- Have more arts and crafts at the seniors centre.

Communication:

- Adult children of older parents need to participate in sessions such as this and be involved in older peoples' issues so they can act as advocates for older people who may not seek out service or information because they "don't want to be a burden".
- Provide more ways to communicate with seniors so they know what's going on in the community.
- Produce an annual publication of seniors services available locally.
- Upgrade the Sooke Lion's telephone book.
- Use space near group mail boxes to set up community notice boards, and have funding available to create these, to build neighbourhood connections and share information.

"It is not all bad, this getting old, ripening." ~ Emily Carr



Transportation:

- Expand community bus service – follow the regular route and add additional routes (e.g. Otter Point, Sunriver).
- Support for Seniors Bus needed. The Sooke Seniors Bus was lauded as a wonderful service. But more volunteers and financial support is needed to keep it going and perhaps expand its service.
- Transportation to banks and shops would be helpful for seniors. Transportation to banks in particular would help reduce financial abuse that can happen if seniors need to rely on another person to do their banking. Existing volunteer services may be able to provide this – with more volunteer support and help.
- Provide a seniors rate for taxis so seniors have options other than driving.
- Provide enclosed and covered bus stops.

Additional ideas:

- Bigger and more accessible farmers' market.
- Volunteer bureau. The need for more volunteers, and ways to recruit volunteers for local agencies was highlighted. Older people have many skills and much knowledge to offer. Having a central volunteer bureau to coordinate volunteers for all community agencies in Sooke could help match skills and knowledge with organizations who need them.
- Encourage intergenerational opportunities such as older people and young people working together in community gardens.
- Provide more educational forums such as this one.
- Lower the age eligible for seniors' discounts and benefits. Some suggested 55, others suggested 50.

Ways to encourage more businesses and services to become age-friendly:

- Develop criteria and acknowledge local organizations who make efforts to become age-friendly. This can be done through incentives such as decals for windows or a contest.

The older the fiddler, the sweeter the tune. ~ English Proverb

What participants thought of the session

Feedback forms were distributed to all participants to provide a rating of their experience of the day, and to provide additional ideas and comments.

Participants were asked to rate, on a scale of 1-10 whether they found the session worthwhile, with 1 being not at all worthwhile and 10 being extremely worthwhile. Fifty-three forms were submitted, and of these 86.8 percent rated the session as worthwhile (6 or higher). The following indicates the numbers received for each rating (numbers do not add to 53 because some did not include a rating):

1-0; 2-0; 3-1; 4-0; 5-5; 6-4; 7-6; 8-16; 9-8; 10-11

Many participants included general comments about the forum, about aging in Sooke, and how to improve such a forum in the future as follows:

- “This is a good idea and helpful. Sometimes networking and finding out who is out there is hard – this makes it easier.”
- More groups interested in aging should be present. (youth, garden club, police, fire department, doctors, people involved with seniors housing, adult children of older parents).
- “Thanks for the opportunity – it’s a great start – very positive!”
- Should have addressed more issues of concern to seniors (e.g. safety and security).
- “This was excellent and bodes well for the future of seniors in Sooke”.
- “Sooke is a fabulous place for people to retire. Retirees who’ve built up lots of equity in cities could bring much to Sooke.”



Ideas about healthy eating

On the feedback forms, participants were asked to rate the lunch on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being exceptionally good, and 1 being very bad. Among the forms submitted, 86.8 percent gave the lunch a 7 or higher rating, with the breakdown as follows:

1-0; 2-0; 3-0, 4-0, 5-3; 6-0; 7-5; 8-4; 9-16; 10-21

Participants were also asked if they would like more choices for healthier foods at local restaurants. Out of 53 forms submitted, 45 (84.9 percent) indicated yes, three said no, and the rest did not make a choice.

Questions about the food were included because some of the restaurants who provided the food went to extra effort to create healthier and tasty dishes from recipes from the handbook “Healthy Eating for Seniors” rather than their regular menu items and wanted to see what

people thought. Copies of this handbook, created by the provincial government last year, were also given out to participants.

Comments from participants about the food at the session and food choices in restaurants were as follows:

- The lunch “was more than excellent. Would ask for it at the restaurant”; “Something interesting that would not be made at home”.
- “I eat out often because it’s easy. I don’t always enjoy it and it isn’t good for my health – today’s lunch was”.
- “I don’t go out that often but when I do I’m satisfied and happy with the selections (in local restaurants)”.
- “Local restaurants are more than up to speed on serving healthy food choices”.
- “I think there are good restaurants with excellent food but they are also expensive”.
- “The foods served today were awesome. This is the type of food I would like to see on a menu”.
- Restaurants should offer smaller portions, or half portions, at reduced prices.
- More choices, especially organic and locally grown food and vegetarian dishes.
- Low-calorie and low-fat options and/or include calorie count on menu.
- More fresh fruit and sugar-free desserts.
- Fewer creamed soups and garlic mashed potatoes
- More grilled and less deep-fried food.
- Indicate ingredients to alert those with food allergies (e.g. gluten- or dairy-free).
- Basic, non-saucy food, or sauces on the side.
- Whole wheat breads; low or no salt soups.
- Meal pick-up service – either frozen or fresh.

Next steps – making sure your message is heard and acted on

- Sooke Economic Development Commission and Sooke Harbour Chamber of Commerce will make this report available to the public and distribute to local businesses and District of Sooke Council and staff. Ideas from the forum on how to make businesses and service providers more age-friendly will also be promoted by the Sooke EDC to potential new businesses and services.
- Participants can print a copy from the District of Sooke website www.sooke.ca. Those who cannot access it from the Internet can call 250-642-6112 and leave your mailing address to receive a copy.
- The Sooke EDC will explore funding opportunities to implement the key actions and ideas raised at the Forum. The Sooke EDC will continue the dialogue with seniors and business organizations by engaging the Sooke Harbour Chamber of Commerce and existing Sooke seniors’ organizations to determine priorities and feasible projects, and apply for grants to implement those projects. Examples of projects to be explored, from ideas raised at the Forum, are: developing an age-friendly recognition program for local businesses and service providers; creating a publication of local seniors services; adding benches along walking routes; developing plans to pursue low-cost seniors housing.
- EMCS has committed to beginning a "50+ Strength & Stretch" program as a direct response to the request at the forum to provide a weight program for older adults in Sooke. Further information on this can be obtained from the EMCS Programs Office. Phone: 250-642-6371 or visit <http://www.emcsprograms.ca/>

Acknowledgements:

Any event owes its success to the many individuals and organizations who contributed time, products and services, and this was no exception.

Thank you to the 88 participants for spending the day to share your thoughts, ideas and comments on how to make Sooke more age-friendly.

Thanks also go to the presenters who provided food for thought on what areas could be explored for more age-friendly business and services. They are: Winnie Yu, Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport, Dr. Veronica Doyle, Age-Friendly Implementation Team, Rebecca George, Sooke Harbour Employment Services, John Farmer, Shoppers Drugs, Todd Olynyk, Royal Bank, Bonnie Sprinkling, District of Sooke, Roberta McDonald, Edward Milne Community School programs office, and Lorraine Brewster, SEAPARC.

In addition, Sooke Harbour Transportation and SEAPARC contributed prizes for the draw for participants, and these contributions are very much appreciated.

Thanks to the Sooke Seniors Drop In Centre for its help promoting the event to imembers.

The local restaurants and food providers who catered the event went above and beyond their regular provision of excellent food and service to provide a unique lunch with new recipes. Thank you to: Markus' Wharfside Grill, Mom's Café, Stonepipe Grill, Stick in the Mud Coffee, and Village Foods. Special thanks go to Randy and Diane Welters who volunteered their time to coordinate the food service.

John Zaremba, Sooke Harbour Chamber of Commerce, was invaluable with his help with registration and promotion, set up and take down. Thanks also to Diane Welters, Aaron Kasper, Brenda Parkinson and Doni Eve for assistance in setting up and taking down chairs and tables. In addition, Doni Eve contributed research, notetaking, writing and design of the report and promotional materials.

Thanks also go to Lisa Urlacher from the District of Sooke for ongoing administrative support to the SEDC and assistance in setting up the audio visual equipment, and development and distribution of promotional materials.

We are grateful to the Union of British Columbia Municipalities, Seniors in Communities Dialogue Program, which provided grant funding of \$3,000 to support the event.

Finally, thanks to the SEDC members and District of Sooke Council for supporting and encouraging this work by the SEDC, and to Mayor Janet Evans for providing opening remarks.

Sincerely,

Rick Kasper

Chair, Sooke Economic Development Commission

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http://www.seniorsincommunities.ca/implementation_team.php

BC Transit

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www.bctransit.com

District of Sooke

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Edward Milne Community School
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Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport

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Healthy Eating for Seniors – copies can be ordered by calling the Health and Seniors Information Line. In the Victoria area call 250-952-1742. In other areas of B.C. call toll-free: 1-800-465-4911.