Better Living

During the legislative event, hosted by Caroline and New Bedford, a panel of guest speakers discussed the age-friendly movement in general and as it pertains to the City of New Bedford. From left to right: Sandra Harris, President/CEM, Massachusetts, and Township, CEO; Greater New Bedford Community Health Center, Joyce Dupont, Wellness Director; Greater New Bedford Community Health Center, Mary Rapaio, Director of Parks, Recreation, and Beaches, City of New Bedford; and Angela Contamina, Senior Transportation Planner, SPEDD.

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New Bedford’s Council on Aging, during the event. Nora Moreno Carige, President of the Tufts Health Plan Foundation, said that five years ago there were only a handful of communities pursuing the project. As of March 2019, there are 48 communities across the state enrolled in the AARP network of age-friendly communities. More than 70 cities and towns are in the process of attaining the designation, including Dartmouth and Mattapoisett, Acushnet and Mattapoisett, Tasco and Murrell. Carige and Maron recently received the designation.

"People are looking to our communities as examples," said Carige. "The movement will affect what matter most to people, which is making communities stronger, services accessible, social engagement possible, and the health of our neighborhoods attainable."

The continued effort to make New Bedford an age-friendly city is divided into eight broad categories, or "domains": outdoor spaces and buildings, transportation, housing, social participation, respect and social inclusion, civic participation and employment, communication and information, and community support and health services.

More than two dozen people representing various agencies, nonprofits and municipal departments are meeting regularly to focus on these eight areas and to ensure that steps on the action plan are being carried out. During the event at Buttonwood, several representatives from the team offered updates and discussed future plans.

We’re working on expanding the availability of evidence-based programs that help seniors live at home for as long as possible," said Joyce Dupont, Wellness Director of the Greater New Bedford Community Health Center. "These programs help with memory and chronic disease management."

She also discussed the upcoming oral cancer screening sessions happening in April. The team focused on oral health because many seniors in the area have identified dental care as one of their greatest needs. At the events in April, there will be SHINE counselors present who can help answer questions about dental insurance.

Mary Rapaio, Director of Parks, Recreation, and Beaches in New Bedford, said the Parks Department has been looking at boosting overall accessibility at local beaches and parks as well as making the journey to those locations easier.

For example, Rapaio pointed to improved lighting and a new walkway into Hazlewood Park from Brock Avenue. The Parks Department is also looking to improve wheelchair accessibility at West Beach. Starting this spring, the City will add new programming, including bowling on the green (or lawn bowling) at Hazlewood.

Angie Constantino, Senior Transportation Planner at SPEDD, said she’s looking at making the overall experience on the bus more user-friendly. Part of that effort will include the expansion of tools riders can use, including online bus routes and individualized, location-based schedules.

"One thing we’re working on is an outreach event at Buttonwood Senior Centers," said Constantino. "The event is planned for May and will include the ability to sign up for senior Charlie Cards directly at the event. We’re also going to have a lot of education on schedules and how to ride the bus. We’re planning on bringing a bus to the senior center."

Senior Scope will continue to report on the age-friendly movement as it expands throughout the country. Check the "Update" section on Page 4 for details on specific events happening in this region.

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