

Age-Friendly Network (AFN) Action Plan SEPTEMBER 2024



KNOX COUNTY
TENNESSEE

Letter from Mayor Jacobs



I am thrilled Knox County is now a designated member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities.

Such communities bring numerous benefits to individuals as they get older. They prioritize the well-being and independence of seniors, promoting a higher quality of life and fostering physical and mental well-being.

Here, our age distribution now aligns with the state and national trends of the 55 and over age demographic serving as our largest population.

Creating and Implementing an Age-Friendly Network Action Plan ensures our aging residents have every opportunity to live in a community where they are appreciated, celebrated, and empowered to remain active and engaged.

The Plan establishes Knox County's commitment to address housing barriers for our aging population and provide a variety of housing options. It highlights our robust park system and the opportunities to increase recreation by providing programs that meet the needs of all residents.

Additionally, it focuses on social connection and the importance of our Knox County Senior Centers, which partner with the Knox County Health Department, Libraries, and other community partners, to provide enrichment and diverse programming for seniors.

Today, senior citizens live healthier, more active lives than seniors from past generations. As Knox County continues to grow, the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities designation allows us to focus on the aging population when considering future investments.

I have always said that Knox County is the best place to live, work and raise a family. When families are invested in the community where they live, they will plant deep roots where their generations will remain.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Glenn Jacobs".

Glenn Jacobs
Knox County Mayor



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Community Profile

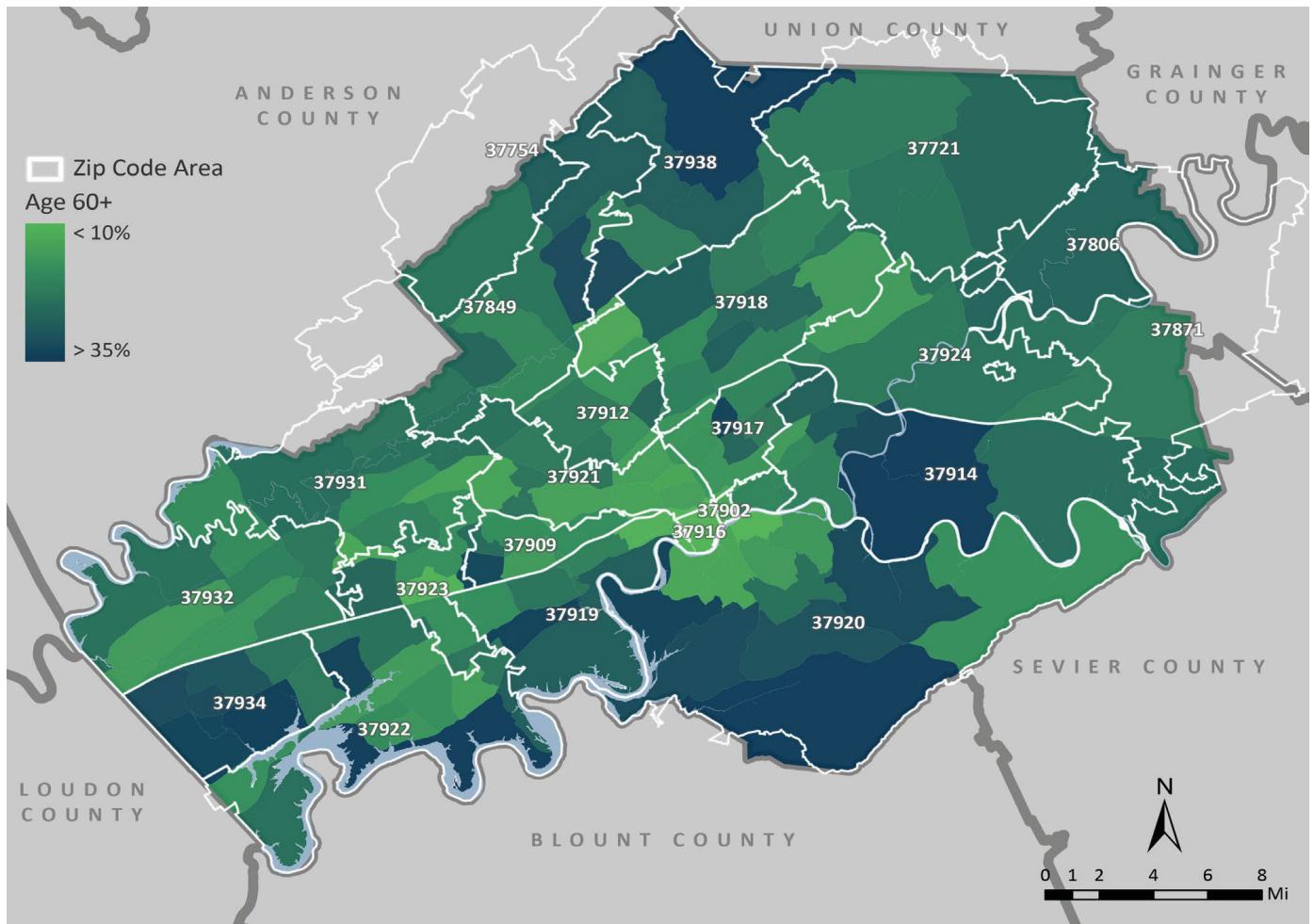
Knox County is at the geographical center of the Great Valley of East Tennessee. Over the last 40 years, Knox County has seen steady population growth. In 1980, the population totaled 320,000; by 2020, the county witnessed a 50 percent gain, reaching 479,000 residents.

County-wide growth is expected to continue over the next two decades. By 2030, almost 39,000 new residents are expected—a gain of eight percent. By 2040, the population is expected to reach a total of 557,000 residents. A continued influx of new residents is the primary factor influencing growth projections.¹

The age distribution of Knox County’s population has shifted and aligns with both state and national trends. Age 55 and over is now the fastest growing group and will continue to be through the year 2040.²

According to the 2017-2021 American Community Survey, an estimated 22% of Knox County's population, or almost 104,000 individuals, were over the age of 60. The ZIP codes with the highest number of residents aged 60 or older in Knox County were 37918 (10,261), 37920 (9,567) and 37922 (8,250). The ZIP codes with the lowest number of residents aged 60 or older were 37806 (805), 37902 (329) and 37916 (157).

KNOX COUNTY RESIDENTS AGED 60+ BY ZIP CODE



Source: American Community Survey Data 2017-2021

The shifting demographic presents a unique opportunity for Knox County to become more prepared. Preparing for an aging population has been a central focus point through updates to Knox County’s Advance Knox Plan as well as updates to the county’s Community Health Assessment (CHA), Parks and Recreation Master Plan and American with Disabilities Act (ADA) Transition Plan.

Introduction to the Plan



In May of 2021 Knox County Mayor Glenn Jacobs announced the start of a formal process to update the Knox County General Plan, deemed Advance Knox, and create its first Comprehensive Land Use and Transportation Plan. The General Plan, which has provided the framework for Knox County’s growth, had not been revised in 20 years. The new Comprehensive Plan will guide decisions about where and how growth occurs and where investments in infrastructure and services are made throughout Knox County.

Two integral elements of the Advance Knox process included information sharing with the community as well as hosting public outreach events and other engagement opportunities to solicit valuable citizen input.

Through the work of Advance Knox as well as through research conducted by the University of Tennessee for Knox County’s Community Health Assessment, it has been noted that the fastest growing segment of the county’s population is persons aged 55 and over. This trend is predicted to continue through the year 2040. Seeking the AARP Age-Friendly designation for Knox County establishes a commitment to devote a special focus on the aging population when considering growth updates in the county.

Today’s senior citizens live healthier, more active lives than seniors from past generations. The increase in life expectancy, combined with the size of the cohort comprising the generation — the Baby Boomers (born between 1946-1964) — is having a substantial impact on local social services, housing, transportation, and the economy.³ While the Baby Boomers represent a significant cohort of the senior population, they are not the only generation represented in the group age 65 and older. The Silent Generation (1928-1945) and the Greatest Generation (1901-1927) are also represented in this senior age group.

In addition, at least 61 million people in the United States report living with at least one disability, or approximately one in four adults (25.7% of the population).^{4,5} Over 54,000 people in Knox County, or 11.9% of the total population, have at least one disability. Knoxville has an even greater share of people with disabilities at 13.5%. In fact, some parts of the city report more than a 20% disability rate.⁶

While individuals of any age can have disabilities, prevalence increases significantly as people grow older. In fact, more than 60% of people over the age of 75 with disabilities have more than one type of disability. Because the incidence of disabilities increases with age and the senior population is increasing in Knox County, we can reasonably expect that the number of people with disabilities will grow over the next several years.⁷

This action plan is aimed towards creating opportunities for recreation, engagement, and a wider variety of housing to improve overall quality of life and ease some of the burdens for Knox County residents as they age.



Action Plan Housing



As Knox County's population continues to grow so does the demand for housing. The Knoxville Metropolitan Statistical Area which includes Anderson, Blount, Campbell, Grainger, Knox, Loudon, Morgan, Roane, Union and Sevier County have become some of the fastest growing housing markets in the state. However, the supply of available housing has struggled to keep pace and home builders have faced ongoing challenges from labor shortages and escalating material costs. First-time homebuyers, aging individuals, and disadvantaged groups have experienced the largest shortage of options.

To accommodate the increasing population and economic challenges, additional housing options are needed. A variety of housing types can increase housing stock and affordability. As Knox County embarks on creating regulations around its Comprehensive Plan, it will be addressing barriers to housing as part of that process.

Objective: Promote housing options that meet the needs of the current and future residents.

Action: Focus Housing and Urban Development funding on preserving the existing affordable housing stock and increasing affordable housing in both rental and homeowner markets.

Action: Increase availability of affordable housing by reducing barriers.

Action: Implement the Knox County Home Rehabilitation Program, focusing on providing necessary home repairs and accessibility improvements for owner-occupied low-to-moderate income households, with an emphasis on housing stability for seniors and individuals with disabilities.

Action: Create new zoning districts to implement mixed-use place types. New zoning districts should provide a range of housing options and clear parameters.

Action: Define and allow various forms of housing in the zoning code by right. This would mean no zones that only allow single-family houses but allow a mix of small-scale housing options that are compatible with each other to increase housing stock and options to increase affordability.

Action Plan Social Participation

In 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General released a report on the epidemic of social isolation and loneliness in our country and its threat to overall individual health and longevity. According to the report, lacking social connection can increase the risk of premature death as much as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day. Additionally, poor or insufficient social connection is associated with increased risk of disease, including a 29% increase of heart disease and a 32% increased risk of stroke.⁸

The importance of social connection and participation are key elements driving outreach provided by Knox County Senior Services Department. The mission of the department is to, “provide community seniors with diverse quality of life programming for their physical, social, and intellectual well-being.” Knox County has six centers located throughout the county. All senior centers are professionally staffed and provide diverse programming specifically geared toward seniors aged 50 and over. These programs offer recreational, educational, informational, and social activities along with special events for seniors. Knox County’s Senior Centers are a vital resource for connecting seniors with needed services in our community and providing opportunities for social connection.

Knox County Health Department (KCHD) in partnership with Knox County Senior Services offers the Stay Active and Independent for Life (S.A.I.L.) program at Knox County Senior Centers. This program is spearheaded by KCHD’s Falls Prevention Health Educator. While the key focus of this outreach is to provide a low-cost group exercise program that focuses on exercises to improve balance, flexibility, strength, and endurance, it also offers a platform for seniors to engage and build peer relationships.

While Knox County Senior Services Department provides services exclusively to the approximately 145,000 Knox County residents who are aged 50 years or older, Knox County Public Libraries and Knox County Parks and Recreation Departments provide opportunities for all ages—a key component for an age-friendly community.

Knox County Public Libraries offers a wide range of programming across the lifespan that aligns with age-friendly principles. Programs are hosted at various branches across Knox County. In addition, it offers multiple platforms for residents to access reading materials.

Knox County Parks and Recreation Department offers a robust Adult Recreational Sports program with an added emphasis on seniors’ slow pitch softball. Senior softball leagues operate in the spring and the fall for those 60 years of age and older. The Parks and Rec Department hosts an annual International Senior Softball Association (ISSA) Slow Pitch softball tournament with over 100 teams of seniors participating.

Objective: Increase community awareness of Knox County Senior Center services.

Action: Promote Knox County Senior Centers by distributing brochures, media, social media, and community engagement.

Objective: Increase monthly program opportunities.

Action: Offer monthly programming at Knox County Senior Centers based on participant input and most recent trends in the best interest of seniors aged 50 and over.

Objective: Increase Elder Financial Fraud and Exploitation Awareness at all Senior Centers.

Action: Promote financial fraud education and awareness at all senior six centers to reduce the number of seniors affected by financial fraud.

Objective: Increase opportunities for Knox County seniors to be physically active.

Action: Knox County Health Department will annually host at least one S.A.I.L. train the trainer event to expand S.A.I.L. instructor base to increase the number of S.A.I.L. classes throughout the county.

Objective: Offer opportunities for senior enrichment.

Action: Knox County Public Libraries will offer one monthly adult enrichment activity at a minimum of 10 of its 19 locations.

Objective: Enhance public health initiatives to promote healthy aging.

Action: Knox County Health Department will pursue and secure designation as Age-Friendly Public Health System through Trust for America’s Health.

Action Plan Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

Crucial resources that are most crucial for health and independence of seniors include medical centers, transit, recreation and meeting spaces, and libraries. A detailed directory of senior services is provided by Knoxville- Knox County's Community Action Committee (CAC). The Knox Seniors Service Directory is updated every two years and is available online as well as for free in large print.⁹

Knox County Public Libraries

Knox County Public Libraries (KCPL) is the oldest public library system in the state of Tennessee, and its core vision is reflective of an age-friendly community, "the essential connection for lifelong learning and information for every citizen." KCPL serves the community through its 19 locations throughout the county, including one of the premier historical and genealogical centers in the Southeast, the East Tennessee History Center.

Knox County Parks and Recreation

The Knox County Parks and Recreation Department offers a variety of programs, outdoor activities, and opportunities for people of all abilities and interests. The Parks department maintains over 50 parks with over 40 miles of greenway and trails, five dog parks, four splash pads, four-disc golf courses, three golf courses and one intergenerational park. There are 14 pavilions available on a first come, first serve basis or through reservation.

With such a variety of options, the department relies on the assistance of many community partners to bring these programs to life. All generations have options year-round. There are also many opportunities to volunteer with Knox County Parks and Recreation. The department maintains a full list of park activities and an updated calendar of events on their website.

In December 2023, Knox County Parks and Recreation adopted a system-wide parks and recreation master plan. The plan was developed through a robust process that included analyzing community engagement efforts, existing recreation assets, conducting staffing and programming assessments, as well as benchmark analysis of peer communities. Objectives and action items outlined below are gleaned from the master plan.

Objective: Create a park system that is accessible to and meets the needs of all residents.

Action: Meet national benchmarks for neighborhood, community, and county-wide park space. Use benchmarks reported by the National Recreation and Parks Association to track the amount of parkland per 1,000 county residents and various ratios of other amenities compared to similar jurisdictions. Additionally, ensure that park space is distributed throughout the county.

Objective: Connect a system of greenways.

Action: Continue to fund strategic greenway expansions as part of the Capital Improvements Program (CIP). Build out the spines of the greenway network strategically through the CIP. Leverage grant opportunities and private development where possible.



Summary

In closing, Knox County is actively working to prepare for its rising number of senior residents. Considerations of housing supply, opportunities for social engagement, and recreational amenities are the primary areas of focus for Knox County's Age-Friendly Action Plan.

The Knox County Age-Friendly team, which is comprised of staff from the health department, community development, senior services, disability and constituent services, as well as Knoxville-Knox County Planning, will monitor and document progress on the plan objectives. Through this coordinated and intentional approach, we look forward to a Knox County that is vibrant and thriving for residents of all ages.



More Resources

[AARP Livable Communities:](#)

AARP supports the efforts of neighborhoods, towns, cities and rural areas to be great places for people of all ages. More information about this initiative can be found at <https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/>

[2023-2025 Senior Directory:](#)

The Community Action Committee's (CAC) Office of Aging produces this free resource directory. Printed copies are available for free.

[Knoxville-Knox County Grandparents as Parents Program:](#)

Established in August 2000, the Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee's Office on Aging created the Grandparents as Parents program to address the unique needs of grandparent and relative caregivers raising children whose parents were unable to care for them.

The program produces a resource guidebook to provide information and resources to assist with the responsibilities and challenges of raising grandchildren.

[Knox County Grants and Community Development:](#)

Knox County Grants and Community Development is responsible for the administration and oversight of a variety of programs funded through local, state, and federal grant dollars.

[Knox County Health Department:](#)

The mission of the Knox County Health Department is to encourage, promote, and support the development of an active, healthy community through innovative public health practice. The health department offers a wide range of services from immunizations, home visiting programs, senior falls prevention to chronic disease management education.

[Knox County Public Library:](#)

The mission of Knox County Public Library is to serve all residents as an educational, informational, recreational, and cultural center through a wide variety of resources, services, and programs.

The library offers a free service for adult Knox County residents who are unable to come to the library without assistance due to a permanent or temporary disability and have no one to pick up materials for them. Found out more at <https://www.knoxcountylibrary.org/homebound-disability>.

More Resources

[Knox County Parks and Recreation:](#)

Knox County Parks and Recreation provides seniors with many ways to get out and stay active. There are several greenways and walking trails, plus, community and senior centers that offer programs and events.

[Knox County Veteran Services:](#)

The mission of the Veterans Services Office is to assist Veterans and their dependents in filing applications and provide information to Veterans and their families on all federal and state benefits earned by Veterans in service to their country.

[Knox County Senior Services:](#)

The mission of Knox County Senior Services is to provide seniors with diverse quality of life programming for their physical, social, and intellectual well-being. These services are provided through Knox County's six senior centers.

[Tennessee Commission on Aging and Disability \(TCAD\):](#)

The Tennessee Commission on Aging and Disability is the designated state agency on aging and is mandated to provide leadership relative to aging issues on behalf of older persons in the state.

TCAD released its annual [statewide data profile](#) in November 2022.

[Trust for America's Health \(TFAH\) Age-Friendly Health Systems:](#)

To encourage the adoption of healthy aging as a core public health function, TFAH has created the Age-Friendly Recognition Program that recognizes healthy aging programs and priorities within health departments, public health organizations, and by individuals.

References

- 1, 2 [Advance Knox: State of the County Report](#), May 2022, pg. 4.
- 3 [Senior Population in Knox County, Knoxville-Knox County Planning](#), May 2020, pg. 1.
- 4 [Prevalence of Disability and Disability Types by Urban-Rural County Classification](#), – United States, 2016.
- 5 [Prevalence of Disabilities and Healthcare Access by Disability Status and Type Among Adults](#), MMWR Morb Weekly Report, August 17, 2018, pg. 1.
- 6 [Living with Disabilities in Knox County, Knoxville-Knox County Planning](#), April 2021, pg. 2.
- 7 [Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community](#), May 2023, pg. 8
- 8 [Senior Population in Knox County, Knoxville-Knox County Planning](#), May 2020, pg. 8.



KNOX COUNTY

TENNESSEE
HEALTH DEPARTMENT