

# A VISION FOR AGE-FRIENDLY BOSTON

Martin J. Walsh | MAYOR, CITY OF BOSTON

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with its abundant  
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to stay active, engaged,  
and connected to their  
communities. ►**

Nearly one year ago, I was sworn in as the 54th mayor of the City of Boston, as my mother, Mary, looked on with pride. In 1959, she came to Boston from Ireland at the young age of 17. She and my father, John, worked hard, volunteered in our community, and provided a safe and loving home. My mother still lives in the three-family house where I grew up, and I live just a few short blocks away.

My mother keeps a busy schedule with friends, family, and neighbors, because staying connected and active is important to her. And making sure that all of Boston's

older residents can lead rich and fulfilling lives is important to me. Standing on stage at that inauguration ceremony, with my mother behind me and thousands of spectators in front of me, I promised to understand and meet the needs of older people—from housing and income, to health and mobility.

One of the first things I did to follow through on this commitment was sign Boston up to join the World Health Organization's Global Network of Age-Friendly Communities, through AARP. As the first member of my family born in the United States, I appreciate how the Age-Friendly Network connects communities across the world. Together we are experiencing an unprecedented shift in population, and in order to prepare for change, we need to listen and learn from each other, not just here in Boston, but globally as well.

The Age-Friendly philosophy is closely aligned with my vision for Boston. The guiding principle focuses on designing livable communities that promote good health, strong civic participation, and clear communication. That means adopting safe, walkable streets; offering better housing and transportation options; enabling access to key services; and providing opportunities to be socially engaged. It means sustaining economic growth and enabling happier, healthier residents. In other words, an Age-Friendly city is a thriving and inclusive city for all.

Make no mistake: Boston is already a great city for our older residents. With our strong public transportation, exceptional healthcare, and broad array of social, cultural, and educational opportunities, Boston traditionally ranks among the strongest for older people. We have in-home supports for those who need them, City-funded transportation, and a network of volunteer options to engage our older residents in meeting the needs of our community. But we know that we can always do more. I have made a commitment to grow and strengthen my Commission on Affairs of the Elderly and all the supports and opportunities we offer Boston's older residents.

One of the biggest challenges we face is a product of our success: Boston is growing. Much of that growth will be driven by the older adult population as baby boomers move into their later years. In fact, older adults are Boston's fastest-growing demographic. The number of people ages 60 and over is projected to rise 65 percent from 2010 to 2030—from 88,000 to close to 130,000 people. We are considering the implications of this population shift in every decision we make as a City.

In the fall of 2014, we launched a groundbreaking housing plan called "Housing a Changing City: Boston 2030." It is designed to accommodate the projected 20 percent growth of Boston's population by the year 2030, including our expanding share of older adults. Through the production of 5,000 new older adult housing units by 2030, combined with increased housing stabilization and support services to older homeowners, we hope to keep Bostonians of all income levels housed in our City as they age.



- 1 Mayor Walsh with 102-year-old Josephine Worrel at an inauguration celebration.
- 2 Mayor Walsh with AARP Age-Friendly certificate and Boston residents (left to right, starting in back) Carl Vickers, Morris Englander, Carmen Pola, Brenda Vanstory, and Shiao-Shen Yu.
- 3 Mayor Walsh at an inauguration celebration with East Boston resident Sabina Taylor.

One of the reasons that so many people want to live in Boston is the abundance of opportunities we offer for people to stay active, engaged, and connected to their communities. Boston is a city where there is always something to see or do, with our network of neighborhood-based older adult programming, the wealth of lifelong learning opportunities offered by our colleges and universities, and our beloved sports teams. In addition, for the first time in 20 years, I have elevated arts and culture to a cabinet-level position. As we move forward with both our Age-Friendly agenda and the City's first comprehensive cultural plan, we will increase opportunities and improve access for all.

A broad range of transportation options and a commitment to accessibility are necessary if everyone is to take advantage of all that Boston has to offer. That is why my Administration is moving forward on a transportation planning process, Go Boston 2030, which is broad in scope, rich in community input, and aligned with key Age-Friendly guidelines. Already, we fund and operate the Senior Shuttle, offering rides to medical appointments and grocery stores for Boston's older residents. With 40,000 rides provided every year, this is an important service. I'm proud to say that by the end of this year, almost half of our shuttle fleet will be accessible.

We are also upgrading our famously walkable streets with an eye toward accessibility. We have embarked on a mission to make our entire portfolio of City-owned pedestrian ramps accessible to all by 2025. We have rebuilt more than 4,000 ramps since April 2011, and we will continue to move forward at an aggressive pace, rebuilding at

least 900 ramps per year. In addition, my Commission for Persons with Disabilities has been working on improving wheelchair access in taxis. Decals on taxis now identify their level of accessibility, allowing people with disabilities to identify useable cabs.

Finally, a key component of my Age-Friendly vision is civic engagement. We cannot achieve any of our goals without making it a priority to engage and consult residents, including older adults, in the solutions we create for them. In September 2014, we launched Neighborhood Engagement Walks (NEW) Boston. Representatives from our Office of Neighborhood Services are walking all 850 miles of our streets to engage constituents on the ground and closely examine every facet of every neighborhood. The findings of this comprehensive evaluation will be an important data source as we move forward with our Age-Friendly needs assessment process.

Through the Age-Friendly framework, my Administration will continue to advance initiatives that benefit all of Boston's residents, including older adults and people with disabilities. I am honored for the opportunity to work on Age-Friendly Boston. In partnership with AARP, we will learn from, and give back to, this global network focused on building cities and communities that work for people of all ages. ●



**Martin J. Walsh**

Mayor Martin J. Walsh became Boston's mayor on January 6, 2014. Previously, he served 16 years as a state representative, establishing himself as a leader on job creation, economic development, civil rights, and substance abuse and recovery issues. He is a former union laborer and leader of the Building Trades.