

AGE-FRIENDLY MILWAUKEE COUNTY OVERVIEW

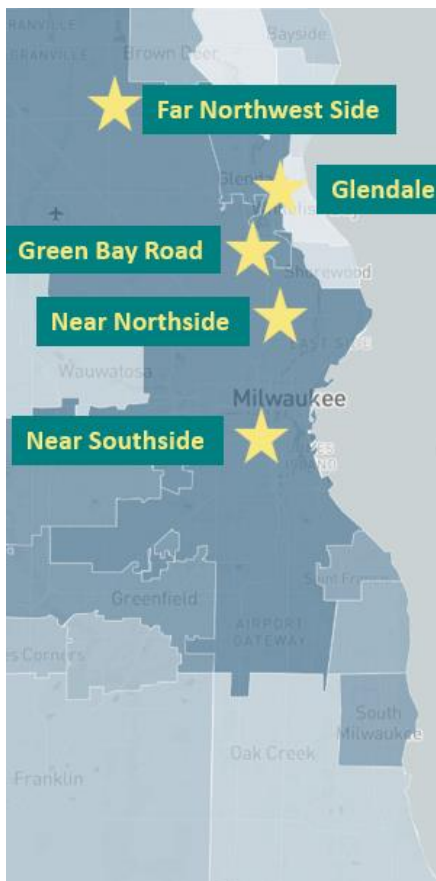
AARP Wisconsin welcomed Milwaukee County as a member of the “AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities” in September 2024. Milwaukee County is the first county in the state to earn the designation. The AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities helps participating communities become better for residents of all ages by addressing priority needs identified in the built and social environments.

WALK AUDIT OVERVIEW

A walk audit is a simple activity in which a team observes and evaluates the walkability of a location to document how and if pedestrians, especially those with mobility challenges, can safely travel along a street, navigate an intersection, etc. Age-Friendly Milwaukee County took a broader approach to its walk audits to include assessment of additional domains of livability related to transportation, housing, health, outdoor spaces, social connection, and civic engagement to get an “on-the-ground” look at various communities’ assets and limitations in these areas. All walk audits were conducted in October 2025.

AGE-FRIENDLY MILWAUKEE COUNTY WALK AUDIT LOCATIONS

The Age-Friendly Milwaukee County Steering Committee and leadership selected five general locations for walk audits. Locations were selected based on publicly available data reviewed by the Committee, available partner community and neighborhood groups, and a desire to visit communities with varying character, demographics, assets, and limitations. Specific 1-2 mile walking routes were planned jointly by Age-Friendly Milwaukee County leadership and partner neighborhood/community organizations. While each walking route had uniqueness, routes generally included a mix of major thoroughfares/intersections, residential areas, commercial areas, parks and other neighborhood assets, and public transportation stops.



- 1) Far Northwest Side** (83rd Street & Brown Deer Road, to the north and west)
Partner Organization: African American Roundtable
 Highlights included the commercial corridor of Brown Deer Road, low- and high-density residential areas and natural area (Kohl Park).
- 2) Glendale** (Bayshore Mall area and to the south)
Partner Organization: Glendale Mayor’s Office & Neighborhood Resident
 Highlights included the Bayshore Park & Ride, Bayshore Mall, major road intersection, freeway off-ramp, and suburban residential area.
- 3) Green Bay Road** (Lincoln Park and to the west)
Partner Organization: Friends of Lincoln Park
 Highlights included the thoroughfare of Green Bay Avenue, Lincoln and Meaux Parks, school zone, and residential area.
- 4) Near Northside** (Keefe Avenue & 5-Points within the Harambee Neighborhood)
Partner Organization: Riverworks Development Corporation
 Highlights included Keefe Avenue, 5-Points intersection, vacant lot activation, infill housing, and the Beerline Trail.
- 5) Near Southside** (Walker Square Neighborhood)
Partner Organization: Walker Square Neighborhood Association
 Highlights included small business and social service integration into dense residential area, freeway off-ramp, and Walker Square Park.



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WALK AUDIT PARTICIPATION

Walk audit participation included elected officials (2), neighborhood residents (27), partner neighborhood/community organization staff (8), Age-Friendly Milwaukee County Steering Committee members (9), and Milwaukee County staff (3). In total, 49 individuals participated in one or more walks.

WALK AUDIT FINDINGS

Findings reported below highlight major themes aggregated from all five walk audits. For each domain, findings are categorized by assets, limitations, and suggestions for improvement made by walk audit participants.

Transportation

Because the walk audits focused most heavily on transportation, findings for this domain are separated into three subsections: Pedestrian & Bike Safety, Public Transportation, and Roadways.

Pedestrian & Bike Safety		
Assets	Limitations	Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buffers between sidewalk and road • Wide sidewalks • Curb cuts present and most have tactile pads • Pedestrian signals work and are largely in appropriate places 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uneven, obstructed and incomplete sidewalks • Poorly marked or missing crosswalks • Lack of pedestrian crossing and school zone signage • Infrequent designated bike lanes • No audio with pedestrian signals • Inadequate time to cross • Misdirected curb cuts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on safety where freeway off-ramps intersect with pedestrian crossings • Add protected bike lanes • Continue complete street improvements • Improve visibility of cross walks • Increase crossing times • Audio features for pedestrian signals • Repair sidewalks

Public Transportation		
Assets	Limitations	Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public transportation available in many areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inaccessible public transportation • Lack of bus shelters or seating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More bus shelters/benches • Improve bus stop signage • Increase bus routes in lower density areas • Improve bus stop accessibility

Roadways		
Assets	Limitations	Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buffers between sidewalk and road • Wide sidewalks • Curb cuts present and most have tactile pads • Pedestrian signals work and are largely in appropriate places 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uneven, obstructed and incomplete sidewalks • Poorly marked or missing crosswalks • Lack of pedestrian crossing and school zone signage • Infrequent designated bike lanes • No audio with pedestrian signals • Inadequate time to cross • Misdirected curb cuts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on safety where freeway off-ramps intersect with pedestrian crossings • Add protected bike lanes • Continue complete street improvements • Improve visibility of cross walks • Increase crossing times • Audio features for pedestrian signals • Repair sidewalks

Housing

Assets	Limitations	Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiet neighborhoods • Mix of housing types • Senior & affordable housing • Some modifiable housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most housing stock inaccessible due to many stairs to enter • Condition of housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home repair assistance

Outdoor Spaces

Assets	Limitations	Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nearby parks and trails • Community events in parks • Activation of vacant lots • Landscaping at homes & businesses • Trees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noise pollution • Air pollution from roadways • Litter without public trash cans • Some areas lacking trees especially along busy roads • Lack of seating, public restrooms and water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plant more trees • Better wayfinding signs related to parks & trails • Increase options for shelter from elements • More public trash cans • Activate more vacant lots • More playgrounds

Social Participation

Assets	Limitations	Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal neighbor networks • Community events in parks • Convenient libraries • Churches • Neighborhood schools • Local restaurants • Nearby recreational activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Segregation & racial division • Some areas lack nearby community and recreational activities • Risk of isolation in areas that are less walkable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local community resource/tech hub

Civic Participation

Assets	Limitations	Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighborhood associations • Community organizations and social services • Murals and cultural institutions • Businesses imbedded in local communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some areas lack nearby businesses that support daily life • Long distances between assets • Disinvestment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business revitalization • Building code enforcement

Health

Assets	Limitations	Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community health center that includes community activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food deserts • Crime rates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food access via new grocery stores or mobile markets • More security/police presence • More lighting



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CONCLUSION

The findings from the walk audit conducted by Age-Friendly Milwaukee County are an important component of the needs assessment phase of the project. In most cases, the walk audit findings reinforce major issues and trends identified through review of publicly available data. Many issues identified are common across the walk audit locations. However, the characteristics of individual neighborhoods revealed that a particular issue has different impacts in different types of areas. For example, while bus stop accessibility was a common challenge across all areas, in less densely populated areas, the main challenge is long distances between stops and area amenities whereas in more densely populated areas, the main challenge is insufficient space for ADA features and bus shelters. In addition, the walk audits underscored the interrelated nature of many issues. For example, while thoroughfare roadways are necessary for an efficient bus system, they create pedestrian safety risks and contribute to poor air quality which can impact health and produce noise pollution that affects residents of nearby neighborhoods.

The walk audit findings will be analyzed by the Age-Friendly Milwaukee County Steering Committee alongside other information gathered during the needs assessment phase of the project including publicly available data, community survey results, and focus group input. This set of information will form the basis for prioritization of domains and issues, creation of a County-wide plan to address the issues, and, ultimately, improved livability for the residents of Milwaukee County now and in decades to come. In addition, the specific findings from each individual walk audit will be shared with municipal and County officials for action on immediate concerns.

Age-Friendly Milwaukee County wishes to thank the community and neighborhood organizations that helped to plan and conduct the walk audits: African American Roundtable, Glendale Mayor's Office and residents, Riverworks Development Corporation, Friends of Lincoln Park, and Friends of Walker Square. In addition, Age-Friendly Milwaukee County greatly appreciates the many residents who shared their time and insights as walk audit participants to help improve their immediate neighborhoods as well as the broader community. Thank you also to the Greater Milwaukee Foundation and AARP which provided financial and in-kind support for the walk audits.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information about Age-Friendly Milwaukee County, visit <https://county.milwaukee.gov/EN/DHHS/Older-Adults-Services/Age-Friendly-Communities> or contact Project Manager, Maria Melendes, at Maria.Melendes@milwaukeecountywi.gov.