

### Importance:

By 2035, the region's population that is 60 years and older will more than double. Many of the region's older citizens wish to remain in their communities and live independently.

### Background/Key Issues:

Until recently most of the focus on policies and programs for senior citizens has been on the social support and service environments. In fact, all of the aging programs at DRCOG have historically reflected those two spheres. However, the built environment, which takes into consideration the housing, transportation and community design needs of citizens throughout their life spans, is just as important.

Throughout 2006 the DRCOG Advisory Committee on Aging and its Livable Communities Subcommittee worked on a significant revision to the Senior-friendly Development element of the Metro Vision Plan. These two DRCOG groups were assisted in their work with a Smart Growth and Aging grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The grant funded research and recommendations for how local jurisdictions can change zoning and other codes to allow development patterns that embrace smart-growth techniques and promote a healthy environment for older adults. Specifically, this study examined the regulatory barriers to senior-friendly development in the Denver region.

The revised and enhanced Senior-friendly Development element of the Metro Vision Plan was approved/adopted by the DRCOG Board in December 2007 as part of the 2035 update. It provides the region's policy makers with greater guidance in promoting and implementing senior-friendly design and development.

The main components of the Metro Vision Senior-friendly Development element encompass the following areas.

- ▶ Housing Options; Location; Affordability and Suitability
- ▶ Development Patterns
- ▶ Pedestrian-friendly Environments
- ▶ Transportation Networks
- ▶ Building and Site Design
- ▶ Parks Facilities
- ▶ Safety and Security
- ▶ Wayfinding (information to help navigate an environment)

### Did You Know?

Nearly 30 percent of the citizens in the DRCOG region are baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964).

# Issues Paper

## Senior-friendly Community Design

### Status (as of December 2009):

DRCOG will also pursue the following steps in order to implement senior-friendly community design.

- ▶ Formulate a comprehensive outreach program to raise awareness of the future demographic shift in the senior population and how DRCOG member governments can make their communities more senior-friendly/healthy.
- ▶ Work with local governments to ensure that local comprehensive plan elements include appropriate healthy aging polices and design guidance. DRCOG staff is currently providing guidance on senior-related housing issues to the Jefferson County Aging Well Initiative.
- ▶ Continue to forge working relationships with public health partners such as the Tri-County Health Department, the Colorado Public Health and Environment's Active Community Environments Task Force, and the Regional Institute for Health and Environmental Leadership at the University of Denver in an effort to make a stronger public health/built environment connection.
- ▶ Begin implementing priority strategies associated with the accessory dwelling unit (ADU) pilot initiative. DRCOG staff and members of an ADU Workgroup will provide information and research to encourage jurisdictions to consider ADUs as viable housing options if their current codes are barriers to building ADUs.
- ▶ Continue working with the Metro Denver Home Builders Association on a universal design and visitability initiative. A kick-off meeting with planners, building officials, and members of the building and design communities is tentatively scheduled for February 2010.

It is worth noting that DRCOG's research and recommendations regarding senior-friendly communities include many of the same tenets that make communities healthy and livable for people of all ages and abilities.

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