

Community Engagement and Planning: Reading Center for Active Living (ReCal)

Key Findings and Recommendations

Commissioned by the Town of Reading

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Acknowledgments

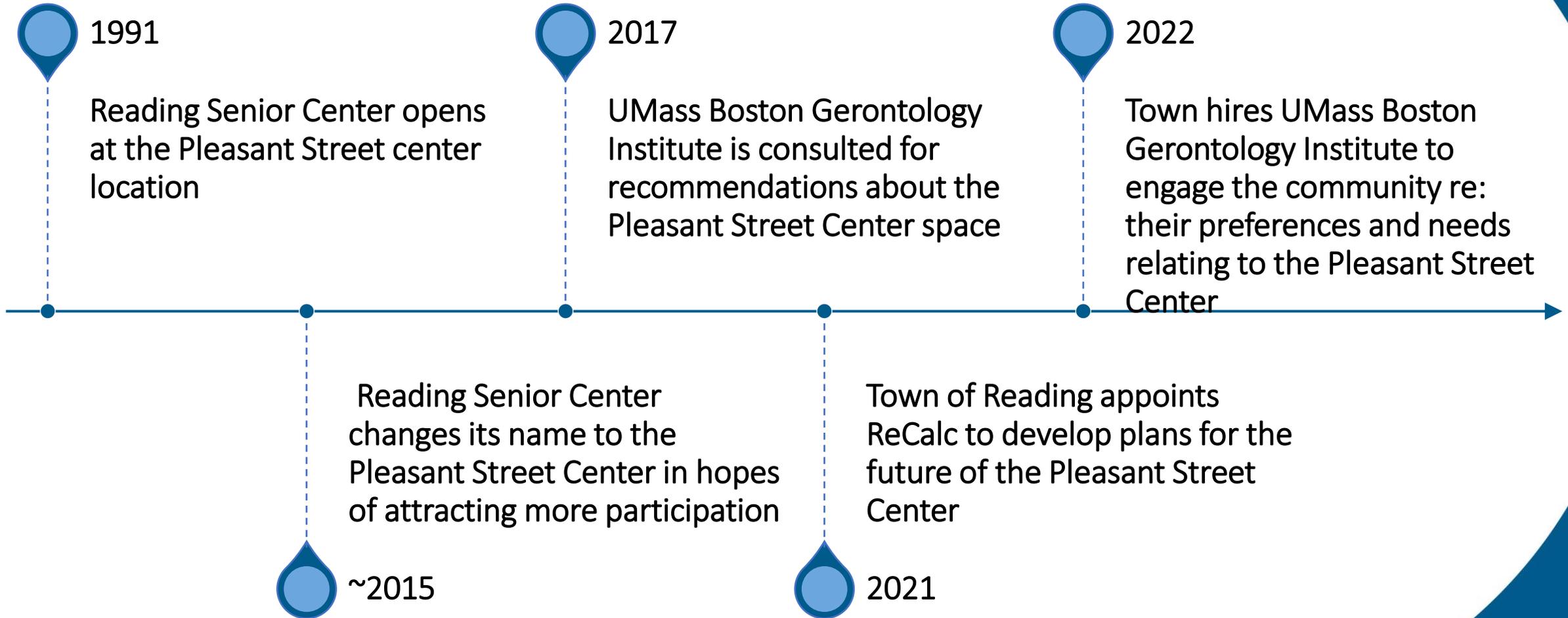
This project would not have been possible without support from:

- ❖ Jean Delios, Assistant Town Manager
- ❖ Genevieve Fiorente, Community Services Director
- ❖ Kevin Bohmiller, former Community Services Director & Veteran's Services Officer
- ❖ The Reading Center for Active Living Committee (ReCalc)
- ❖ The Council on Aging (COA)
- ❖ All the residents who took time to participate in forums, focus groups, and the survey

Background & Purpose

- This project was commissioned by the Town of Reading to “guide a public engagement and planning process for how the community should be moving forward with future needs for programming space, either for a new senior center or a community center” (RFQ)
- The final report is meant to:
 - Inform actions of the Reading Center for Active Living Committee (ReCalc), appointed in 2021
 - Inform planning of programs and services provided by the Pleasant Street Center
 - Raise awareness of the needs of Reading residents among both the community at large and other municipal departments and organizations that work on behalf of the community

Progress to-date



Project overview

Components of the Assessment

3 Community forums (April and June, n=177)

4 focus groups (June and July, n=51)

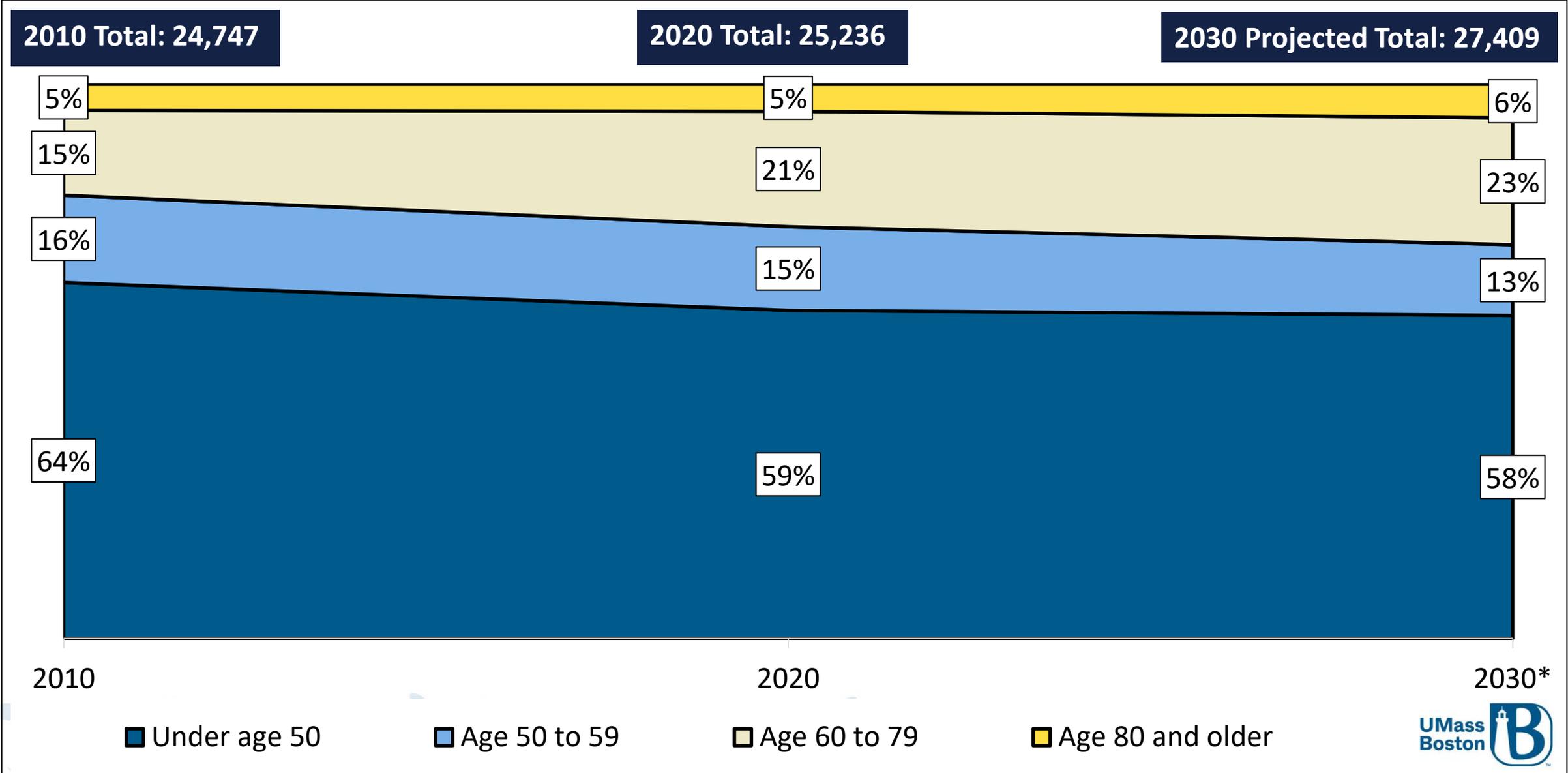
Community Survey 18+ (September, n=1,470)

Current age distribution in Reading

Age Category	Number	Percentage
Under age 18	6,187	24%
Age 18 to 49	8,758	35%
Age 50 to 59	3,803	15%
Age 60 to 79	5,266	21%
Age 80 and older	1,222	5%
Total	25,236	100%

Source: American Community Survey, 2016-2020, Table B01001. Numbers are calculated from 5-year survey estimates.

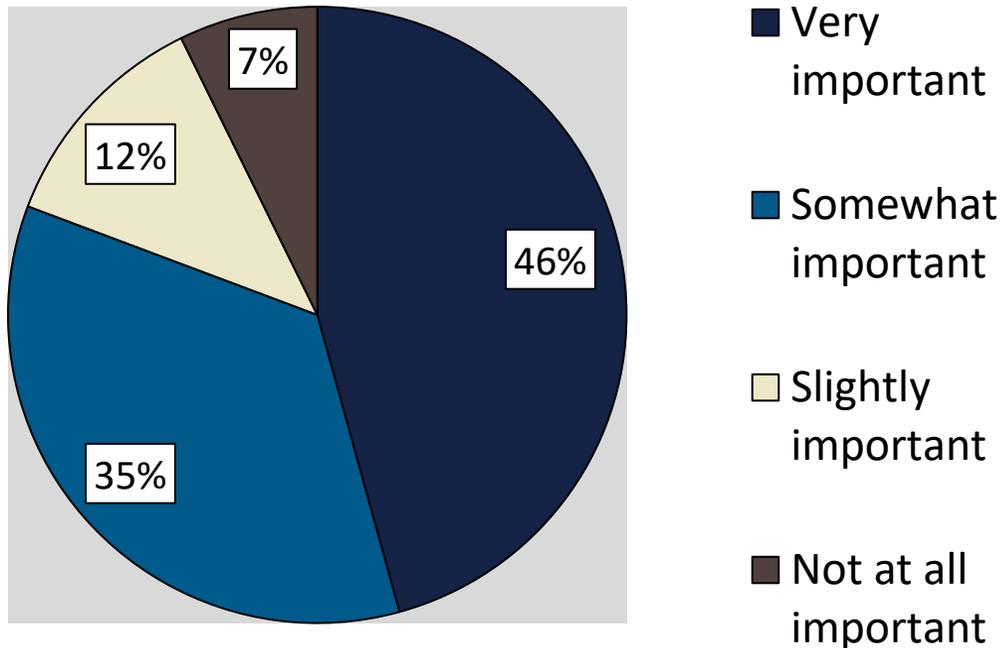
By 2030, 29% of Reading's population will be 60+



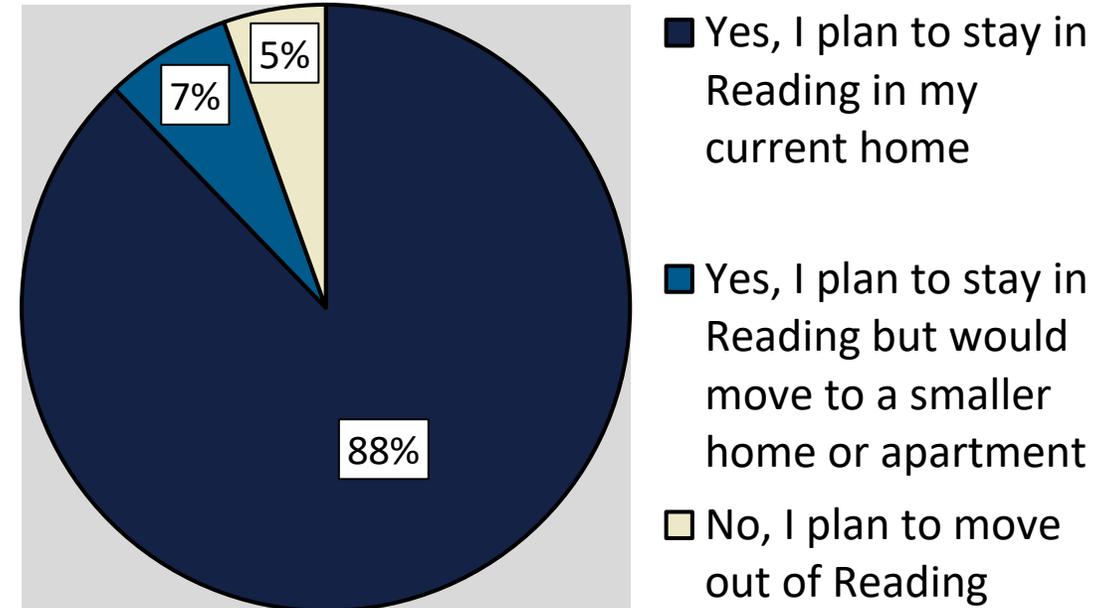
Key Findings:

Residents value living in Reading and want to stay here...

How important is it to you to remain living in Reading as you get older?



Do you plan to stay in Reading for the next 5 years or more?



...but need support

- 1,234 respondents (84%) provided a response to “What are your greatest concerns about your ability to continue living in Reading as you get older”

“Concerned that we will be priced out of Reading with increased taxes, electric and water bills.”

Half reported affordability and cost of living as a challenge

About 20% identified concerns about having the resources to maintain health, independence, and social engagement

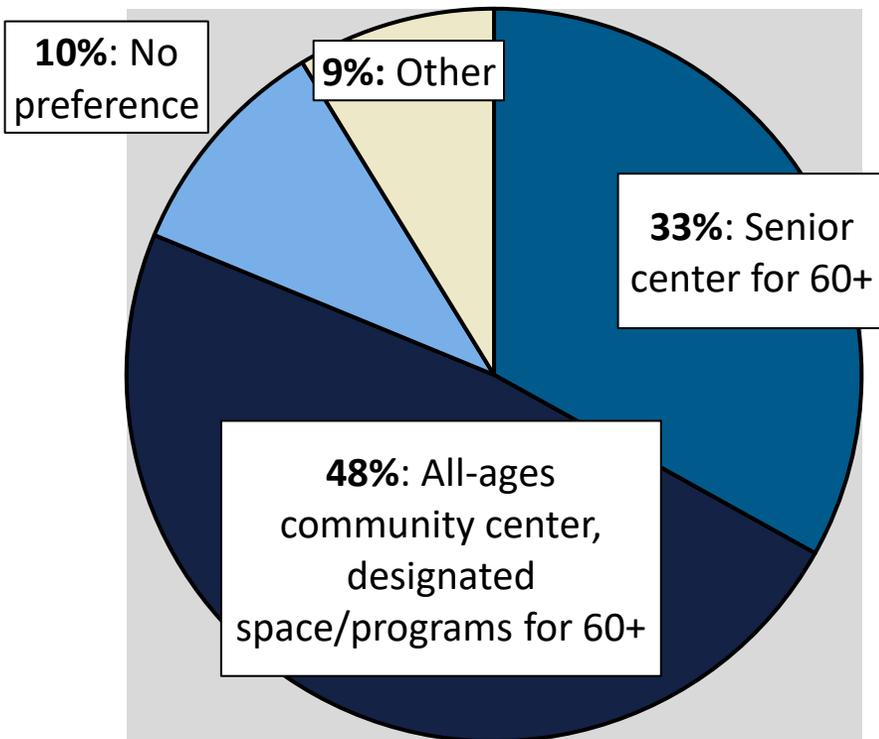
A quarter of respondents are concerned about quality of roads and sidewalks, walkability, parking, and limited transportation options other than driving

“Having support from the community in order to stay in my home. I wish there was a group which aided in handyman projects, medical transportation and more social activities.”

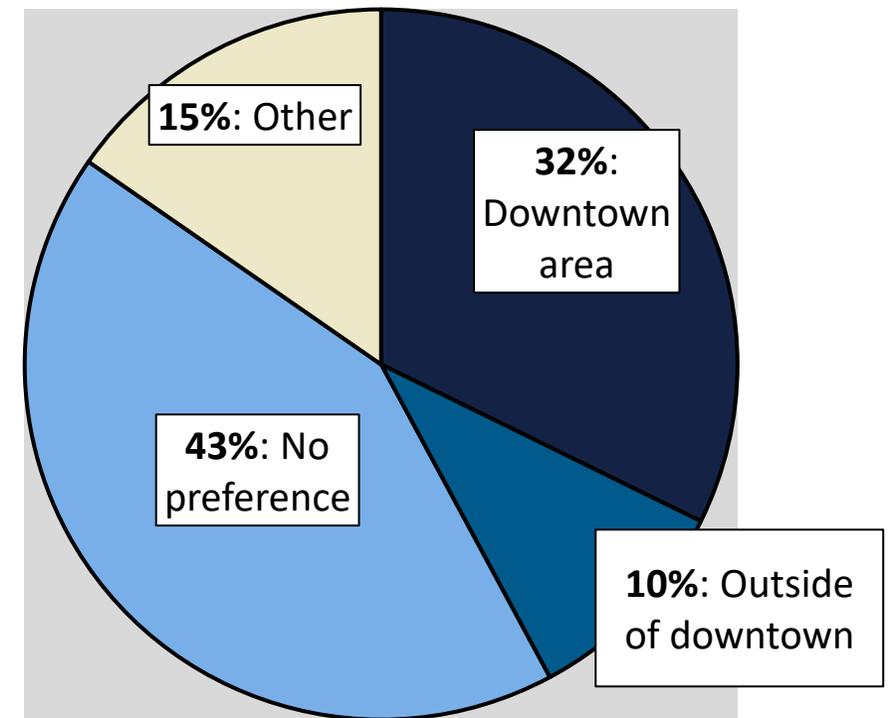
“If/when I lose the ability to drive. How will I get around in my community. How will I be able to get to a store, visit friends, attend medical appointments.”

Space and Location Preferences

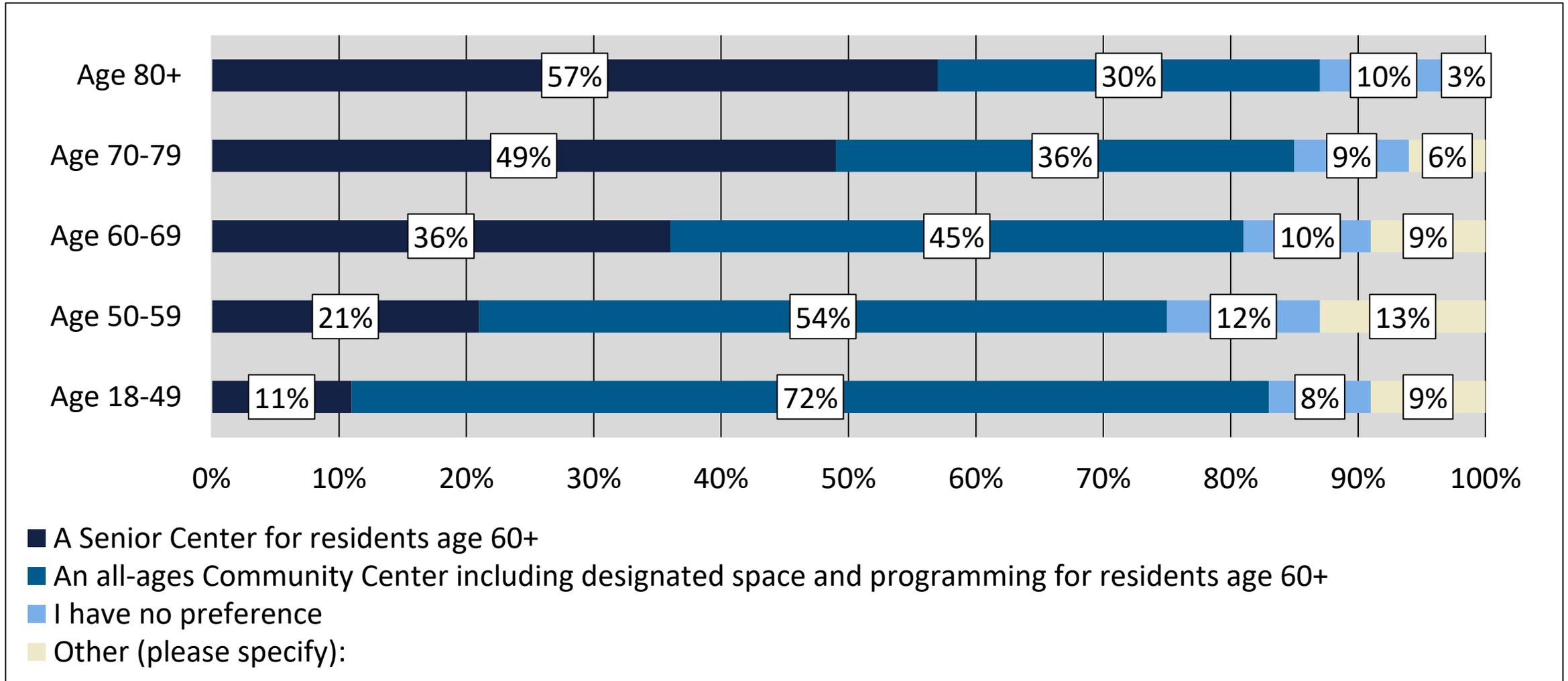
Most preferred scenario for a new senior/community center



Preferred location for a new senior/community center



Preferred scenario, by age group



827 respondents expanded on their selected preference:

"I think that community centers allow people of all ages to interact and take classes and allow people of similar age groups to mingle on their own. I assume that the elderly want to spend time with one another in this type of setting but also want to feel a part of their community."

21% suggested a community center would be an opportunity for community cohesion & inclusion

- Sharing experiences, knowledge, and skills across generations and backgrounds

A quarter identified important attributes of a community or senior center

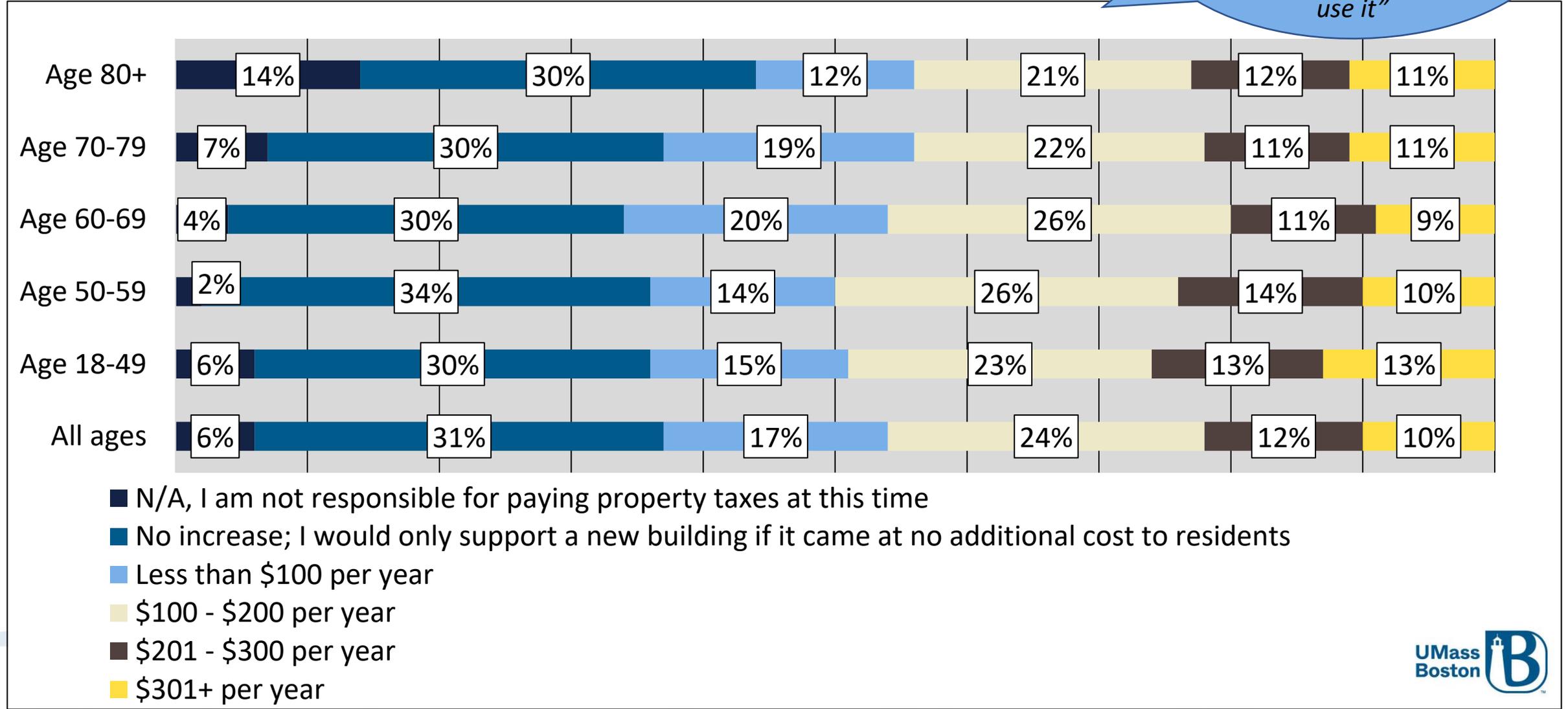
- Parking
- Variety of programming
- Adaptable space
- Have some separate space and programming by age

Expressed some resistance to new building and development (19%)

- Concerns about added cost and competing town expenses
- Perception that town can make use of and repurpose existing resources

Support based on potential tax burden consistent across age groups

"If you have to raise taxes to build one - it's not worth it to me as I won't be able to afford to live in this town to use it"



Top ranked indoor spaces, by age

	All ages	Age 18-49	Age 50-59	Age 60-69	Age 70-79	Age 80+
	43%-68%	42%-68%	47%-67%	42%-67%	46%-69%	50%-69%
Multipurpose space for small group activities (e.g., book club, meetings, card games)	1	1	1	1	1	1
Indoor exercise space for classes (e.g., yoga, Zumba, Pilates)	2	2	2	2	2	3
Multipurpose space for large group activities (e.g., concerts, lectures, parties)	3	5	3	3	3	4
Café or “drop in” food space	4		5	4	5	
Kitchen and dining space	5			5	4	2
Dedicated arts and crafts space (e.g., painting, fiber arts, pottery equipment)		4	4			
Space for games (e.g., mah-jongg, bridge, chess) and billiards		3				
Lobby or lounge space for informal socializing						5

Top ranked outdoor spaces, by age

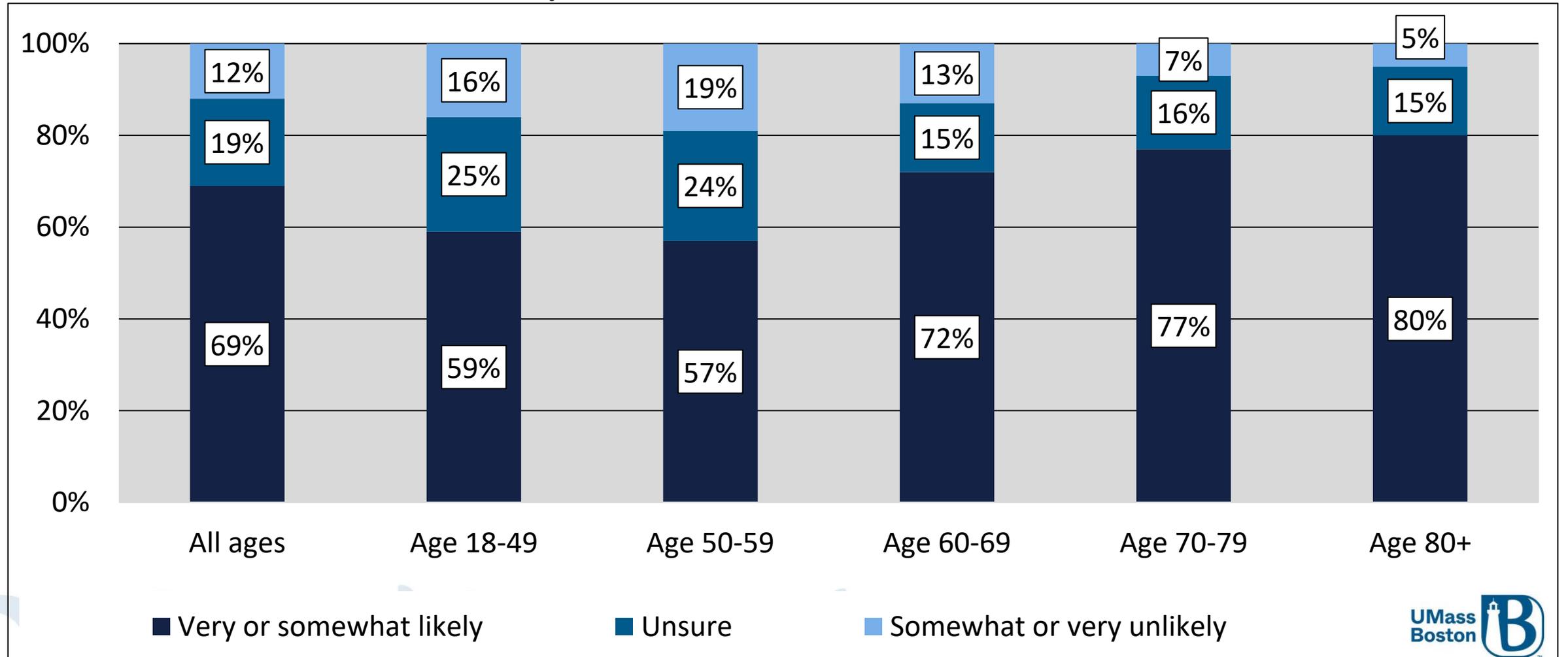
	All ages	Age 18-49	Age 50-59	Age 60-69	Age 70-79	Age 80+
	34%-69%	33%-62%	30%-68%	34%-73%	31%-77%	24%-80%
Benches or comfortable outdoor seating	1	2	1	1	1	1
Picnic tables/outdoor dining space	2	1	2	2	2	2
Grass area for lawn games (e.g., bocce, cornhole, croquet)	3	3	3	3	4	4
Gardening area	4	4	4	4	5	5
A walking/running track	5		5	5	3	3
Team exercise space (e.g., basketball, tennis, or baseball fields, pickleball courts)						
Playground						
Swimming pool						
Splash pad		5				
Outdoor exercise space (e.g., outdoor gym equipment)						

Top ranked accessibility features, by age

	All ages	Age 18-49	Age 50-59	Age 60-69	Age 70-79	Age 80+
	47-66%	48-63%	49-62%	46-68%	48-78%	42-81%
No or little cost to participate in programs	1	1	1	1	2	2
Ample parking	2	5	2	2	1	1
The facility being open in the evenings and on weekends	3	2	3	3		
Enough space for multiple programs to be running simultaneously	4	4	4	5	3	5
Door to door transportation to and from the new center	5		5	4	4	3
Programming that integrated residents of all ages		3				
Dedicated space for older residents					5	4



If a new senior or community center was developed, how likely would you or members of your household be to use the facility?



Key Findings & Recommendations

There is support for additional community gathering space, but more information is needed

Strategies to improve communications

Continue to provide information through a variety of methods, including print, and web-based

Consider additional opportunities for resident feedback as the ReCal project continues

Strategies to improve awareness of and need for ReCalc

Consider conducting open houses or community-wide events at the Pleasant Street Center to demonstrate that it has maxed out its capacity

Residents want to know how this fits into the existing network of resources in the community

Develop an inventory of existing programs and services available to Reading residents

Consider resources by need (e.g., social services, healthcare, recreation) and age

Document existing relationships with other organizations that serve Reading

Consider regular meetings among organizations (e.g., the library, the Y, the PSC, Parks and Recreation, etc.) to improve collaboration and coordination of programs and services

Cultivating an **accessible** and **inclusive** environment is necessary

Establish appropriate hours of operation

- Night and weekend operations
- Scheduling to accommodate different responsibilities and commitments (e.g., school, work)

Consider a multi-feature approach to transportation to improve accessibility:

- Adequate parking spots
- Satellite parking lot with shuttle transportation
- Accessible via MBTA services
- Develop door-to-door transportation services

Develop infrastructure from an inclusive design perspective

- Consult existing resources for key design principles, available through the [Massachusetts Age- and Dementia Friendly Integration Toolkit | Mass.gov](#)

Older residents are open to the idea of an all-ages community center, but value having their own space and experiences with peers

Maintain some separate space, programs, and services for older residents

Maintain core programs and services provided through Elder & Human Services

Maintain adequate access to food/nutrition services for older residents

Ensure that older residents have designated lounge and social space

Consider the development of inter-generational programming, in partnership with other town resources (e.g., schools, the library)

Residents want to access space to participate in a variety of activities, including

Small group
or
independent
activities,
such as book
clubs, games,
arts and
crafts

Exercise
classes

Outdoor
areas to relax
or for light
activity (e.g.,
lawn games,
walking)

Regular
opportunity
to share a
meal with
others (e.g.,
congregate
meals, café
area)

Informal
gathering and
socialization

Sufficient capacity to meet the wide array of resident needs and interests is essential

Include large rooms that can accommodate many participants and that can be divided into multiple smaller rooms

Account for classrooms and program rooms that have the technology for audio and visual presentations and also the capability to receive participants who are participating virtually

Secure adequate private office spaces for staff to conduct 1-1 appointments with residents

Confirm ample staffing levels and appropriate positions to adequately serve residents

Thank you!

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