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**Older Citizens and the Plan-Making Process:
Are Planners Being Neglectful?**

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Older Citizens and the Plan-Making Process: Are Planners Being Neglectful?

An aging population directly influences the activities of community planners. Planning issues have a bearing on the quality of life older people experience living in the community. By consciously involving older citizens in the plan-making process, planners can better understand the visions and unique needs of this sector of the population. A questionnaire was developed to measure the degree of effort planners make to involve older citizens in the planning process. It was administered to planners in a sample of 30 jurisdictions in Florida. The results indicate that planners have generally neglected older adults as part the citizen participation process. Since planners have an important role to play in planning for communities as they age, increased participation of older adults throughout the plan-making process could result in plans and over time, in communities, that are more elder-friendly and therefore more livable for everyone.

As a result of the aging of the U.S. population, major societal changes are occurring and are projected to intensify in the second decade of the 21st century. Many of these changes relate to community planning, and as such, planners have a significant role to play in accommodating America's aging population. Planners need to become aware of the changing demographics of the urban places for which they plan so that appropriate attention can be paid to the needs of all citizens living within these spaces, be they central cities or suburban neighborhoods. Older residents oftentimes have a unique perspective that is overlooked in planning for their communities; yet is critical not only to the well-being of the greater community but also to their successful aging experience. By consciously involving older citizens in the plan-making process, planners can better address the special needs and visions of this important sector of the population through plans and policies which will result in creating more vital and complete communities.

It is through the citizen participation process that planners can hear residents' visions and learn about current and emerging issues that can be addressed in the plan. Conscious involvement of older citizens in the planning process provides an opportunity for planners to become aware of the specific planning needs of this sector of the

population. Currently, the degree to which planners involve older people is unknown; therefore, the key question that structures this inquiry is: To what degree have planners made an effort to involve older citizens in the plan-making process? This paper offers the results of a survey that was designed to measure effort and was administered to planning officials in 30 jurisdictions in Florida. It should be noted that this research is part of a larger study, my doctoral dissertation, which focuses on the relationship between the elder-friendliness of comprehensive plans and planners' effort to involve the older population in the planning process.

In the coming decades, urban planners will be confronted by an unprecedented challenge as American society ages. Not only are there more older people, but they are also living longer. This trend has enormous implications at the community level where the demand for housing alternatives, transportation assistance, and medical and other support services will have to be addressed. The ability of a community to effectively respond to these needs will be influenced by how well the concerns for older adults are integrated with planning efforts through the citizen participation process and in the degree of elder-friendliness of comprehensive plans.

Changing Demographics and the Needs of an Aging Population

An aging population raises important issues for community planners. There are two key considerations that will have a profound effect on how we plan for the future: demographics and the unique needs of an aging population. In combination they create a tremendous need to conceive of ways to provide opportunities for older residents to remain in their communities for as long as possible. Perhaps most important for older adults are the concepts of independence and aging in place. The vast majority has indicated their preference to remain in place, traditionally meaning their home, as they

age rather than relocating to more supportive housing. In 1994 Wilder found that 86 percent of elderly persons surveyed prefer to remain in their homes until they die. This preference was recently confirmed in a survey conducted by the AARP where 83 percent of older persons stated they want to remain at home as they age (Pollak, 2000). By being aware of these realities and how they relate to goals formulated in the plan-making process, planners can contribute significantly to building communities for all people.

Older persons make up one of the fastest growing segments of the American population. In 1983, for the first time in our history, there were more people older than 65 than were younger than 25; in 1996, one in eight were over 65; and it is estimated that in 2030 one in five will be 65 years or older, comprising 20.2 percent of the total U.S. population. This aging of the population is a result of the baby boom generation beginning to turn 65 around 2010. The implications for societal change and community structure are tremendous, and consequently affect the work of community planners.

Gerontologists have suggested that the elderly population is not a homogenous group of people 65 and over, and that this diversity can include a life span of 35 years after age 65. A critical fact that is often overlooked when considering our aging society is that there is variation within the older population that results in different rates of aging with changing characteristics by age cohort and by gender. There are certain biological/physical, sociological, and psychological changes that normally occur, generally as decline, during the aging process, but these changes are highly individualized and do not occur at the same time for all older people.

These inevitable changes, however, result in older adults having certain special or unique needs some of which can readily be addressed through the planning process. Plans

cannot be effective and responsive unless older adults themselves are involved in their formulation. Older citizens know what they need and know what they want and therefore must be an integral part of any strategy that proposes to create more suitable community environments for an aging population.

Citizen Participation in the Plan-Making Process

In recent years there has been renewed interest in citizen participation as an essential element of the comprehensive planning process. Both planning practitioners and planning academics are advocating a stronger emphasis on working collaboratively with citizens in planning practice. According to Lowry, Adler, Milner (1997) the "ideal of citizen involvement in the design of community plans and projects is central to contemporary planning ideology" (p.177). However, there is no definitive statement of what effective citizen participation should be, whom it should serve, or how it should be implemented. Historically, states and local governments have been reluctant to impose any specific standards, or even informal guidelines, outlining when, where, and how public participation efforts should be conducted. Public participation programs in planning vary by jurisdiction, and usually reflect the desires of the planners and elected officials who administer them. They are often not well thought out beforehand, lacking a clear purpose which includes what outcomes citizen participation should receive. Nonetheless, there is consensus in the literature that, at a minimum, public participation must be fair and competent. There is also general agreement on the importance and benefits of participation as a democratic practice; however, most agree that it can be difficult to achieve.

Although there is a large and growing literature which advocates citizen involvement in planning and, more generally, local public policy making, Burby (1998) notes there are various authors who have suggested there are limitations to what can be

accomplished through citizen involvement and have identified potential barriers to the successful development of citizen involvement programs. He suggests these limitations and barriers create the potential for a large gap between what theorists and educators argue for as best practice and what actually occurs in local government planning and policy making. Local governments, however, have a number of choices in crafting citizen involvement programs that may be able to overcome some of the limitations and obstacles that have traditionally characterized participation efforts. The choices made can affect the degree to which local governments involve citizens in planning processes and, as well, the degree to which citizen involvement results in greater political demands to address pertinent issues relative to social and physical community change. According to Burby, the choices most relevant to the efficacy of citizen participation include: objectives, timing, participants, technical information, and techniques used in the citizen involvement process. Arnstein (1969) followed by other authors view these choices in terms of a ladder of participation, on the assumption that the greater empowerment of citizens associated with more collaborative approaches is normatively superior to the one-way communication that characterizes other citizen involvement objectives.

For this paper, the focus will be primarily on the choice of participants as it relates to the theme of older adult involvement in the plan-making process and on the other choices as they relate to the theme of the role of planners in maximizing participation by older citizens. Historically, citizen involvement processes have been viewed as ways to empower citizens whose view have often not been considered in local government decision-making. Empowerment was a key consideration in early federal citizen participation mandates, and is still an important consideration, as reflected by Healy's (1996) comment that participation may be meaningless if ". . . collaborative processes

merely end up being conversations among elites, new forms of old corporatism . . . as opposed to real attempts to involve multiple stakeholders” (p. 153).

Although various assertions about whom to involve in participatory planning processes have been made, Burby (1998) found there is little actual empirical research to suggest what the actual consequences are of making particular choices among the options available. For this research, I conceptualize participation in terms broader than mere representation of stakeholders, but also including both lay citizens and professional actors and community-based and national-level interest/advocacy groups specifically relating to older citizens and/or their representatives.

Participation by Older Citizens

It was necessary to review the literature not only in planning, but also in sociology, urban politics, and participatory democracy to gain an understanding of the degree to which older adults participate in planning and government in general. Although their numbers are significant and they are a very diverse group with differing needs and visions, older adults’ participation in the plan-making process is mentioned in only four of the numerous sources reviewed. Although Howe et al. (1994) included a chapter entitled, *The Participation of Older Adults in Public Meetings*, it was the only chapter of nine in the report that did not have a related bibliography; however, they did stress the importance of involving older adults directly in the planning process since they are the most keenly aware of how the built environment affects their day-to-day lives. They also suggest what planners can do to better accommodate older adults in participation efforts, specifically in public meetings. In his 340-page book, Lawton et al. (1976) included a one-page discussion of citizen participation by elderly citizens. Although dated, since the references are to the Model Cities and Community Action

programs and how older adults were essentially unrepresented on boards, they state that the “full extent of the exclusion of the elderly has not been well documented” (p. 71). A point made in the text that remains apropos today pertains to one of the problems of gaining wider participation by older adults which has to do with the process by which various planning groups are chosen which may put certain older citizens at a disadvantage.

Since there is a gap in the planning literature on participation by older citizens, inferences to the older population can possibly be made from research on participation by citizens in general. Howell, Olsen, and Olsen (1987) suggest three major themes in the social sciences that provide the theoretical framework for citizen participation: democratic theory, social exchange theory, and social mobilization theory.

Lijphart (1997) points out that political equality and political participation are both basic democratic ideals. He goes on to say that in principle they are perfectly compatible, but in practice participation is highly unequal; and unequal participation results in unequal influence. Numerous scholars have indicated that there are significant variations in participation in political decision-making processes – variations which in the United States appear to be functionally related to such variables as degree of concern or involvement, skill, access, socio-economic status, education, residence, age, ethnic and religious identifications, and some little understood personality characteristics (Dahl, 1956; Verba and Nie, 1972; Milbrath and Goel, 1977; Conway, 1991; Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993; Lijphart, 1997).

The political participation literature is rich with discussions of who participates and why with explicit references to older citizens (Verba and Nie, 1972; Milbrath and Goel, 1977; Hudson, 1981; Conway, 1991). Relating to overall participation, Hudson

(1981) shows how interest and involvement in politics decline in later years, particularly after age 65. He demonstrates that as a group, older citizens vote more heavily and more consistently than any other age group, if socioeconomic status (educational attainment and income) is held constant. At this stage in the research, it is not certain if or how these relate to older persons' rates of participation in plan-making processes and whether these findings will be applicable to the aging baby-boom generation.

In her 1990 book, political scientist Christine Day, theorizes on the role of aging-based interest groups in American politics, and her focus is on organizations involved in aging policy on the national and state-level. Day's work sheds light on participation by older adults in mass membership organizations which raises the point that participation in the plan-making process by older citizens should be looked at in terms of individual and special interest group participation. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) in their Civic Voluntarism Model discuss civic gratification which is a cost-benefit calculation of the rewards citizens associate with their participation/political activity. They further state that the consequences of participation include promoting the development of individual capacities, building community, and legitimizing the regime. Older citizens could feel an improved quality of civic life or a fulfilled sense of civic duty through participation as well as a deeper sense of community attachment.

In one of the first planning dissertations written on citizen participation, Godschalk (1972) suggests the "possibility that a general theory of community participation can be based on an adaptation of the body of work known as exchange theory" (p. 38) which was also the theoretical basis of Christine Day's work. Social exchange is a social phenomenon that is centered on social processes of give-and-take in people's relations – Cook (1987) describes it as "exchange between actors" (p. 14)

and Godschalk (1972) uses the term "reciprocal giving and receiving" (p. 23). The argument could be made that the process of participation, in its most fundamental and general terms, is a process of exchange between citizens and government. Casting the process in these terms has a number of implications for the way in which participation is defined and the way in which its behavioral and structural elements are studied. Three types of exchange can be distinguished: collaboration, competition, and conflict. According to Godschalk, the ideal form of exchange taken by participatory planning would be one of citizen-government collaboration.

Within the government setting of the participation process, citizens and government (planners) seek various objectives in pursuit of their interests. They become involved in interdependent relationships, where information, ratification, and resources must be traded in order to gain their separate objectives. While some planners may naively think of citizen participation as a "free good", in reality the citizen participant/actor expects to be rewarded for her/his efforts, just as the planner does. This participation process may be analyzed as a sequence of transactions among various actors, each seeking to profit. Cook discusses the critical role of power and dependence and how an imbalance can produce asymmetrical exchange.

This theory could be readily used to explain why people, in this case, older citizens, participate in plan-making processes. Planners "give" technical information and an opportunity to be part of the process, and citizens "take" the knowledge provided and the opportunity to participate in a civic/social/visioning experience. Citizens "give" their histories, ideas, knowledge and time, and planners "take" these expressions, visions, and information to create goals and objectives for the plan. The power-

dependent relationship, or the concept of equality among all stakeholders, must be kept in balance in order for reciprocity to exist among the participants.

The concept of power leads back to one of the earlier stated goals of participation being to empower local citizens which could be an incentive for older residents to become involved in planning for their communities. The community development/organizing literature contains numerous references to empowerment/disempowerment and the crucial role it plays in community building. Schlinder (1999) notes that the notion of empowerment, which enables older persons to gain mastery and the ability to exercise self-determination, is often curtailed in light of obstacles they face as a result of physical, social, and biological changes.

Empowerment is a vital concept in planning for an aging population for two main reasons. First, many older people begin to feel a loss of self worth, and therefore disempowerment, as they retire from work, live their lives closer to home, and experience a diminished social network of friends. Second, the needs and desires of this older population cannot be assumed by the younger population that is now formulating policies and programs. Creating an environment that fosters empowerment in older Americans (as well as others) enhances the possibilities of planning environments that "fit" these same older people. Heskin (1991) outlines four tools for developing a local power base: community organizing, citizen participation, the reallocation of local resources, and the building of community pride.

Planners, Participation, and Older Citizens

Preliminary research indicates that planners have neglected the needs and visions of older citizens in plans, which has resulted in documents that are generally not elder-friendly (Boswell, 1999). Planners have a moral and ethical responsibility to

consciously include all citizens in the plan-making process. Older citizens must be considered as equal and viable members of the community who have a story to tell or history to share and whose needs and visions should be reflected in the goals and policies of plans. The first step is for planners to become sensitive to ageist attitudes and language and to become aware of the importance of reaching out and encouraging participation by this sector of the population.

Extensive review of the relevant planning literature reveals that planning scholars and practicing planners are contributing to ageism in two ways: first, by using the term elderly as a noun to describe those 65 years and older, and secondly by lumping older adults as "the elderly" in with other special needs groups, such as the disabled or handicapped, low-income, impoverished, uneducated, homeless, and poor. Kart (1990) defines ageism as the untrue assumption that chronological age is the main determinant of human characteristics and that one age is better than another. Although some myths of aging may be true for *some* older adults, ageism is the practice of applying these stereotypes to *all* elders. It results in generalizations about older people that affect how others feel about this sector population. Ageism arises from those who view elders as separate or different, and as people who no longer experience the same thoughts and feelings as the rest of the population (Kart, 1990).

This prejudice and discrimination against older adults stems from a lack of knowledge about aging and limited experience with older people. Planners can play an important role in dispelling the ageism that is so prevalent in our society by considering the issues related to aging that can be addressed through the plan-making process thereby enabling older residents to continue to be active productive members of the

community rather than segregating them through the concept of the *special needs of the elderly*.

Regarding special populations, certainly planning considerations that are given to these groups could benefit some older adults. As explained above; however, it is a grave error to imply that older adults as a group are a marginalized population, although Wolfe (1996) uses the term *marginalized* when describing older adults to imply their general dependence on younger generations. Barber (1981) included two references to older adults where he groups them with “the poor” as a special or targeted interest on which citizen participation efforts often need to focus. It is the concept of dependence/interdependence that is the basis of the vulnerability model purposed by Goodin (1985) in his discussion of social or special responsibilities. He asserts a principle of protecting the welfare of the vulnerable which in so doing produces good social consequences. Goodin suggests that responsibility to the vulnerable is the very essence of public servants’ (i.e. planners’) jobs who are held accountable/responsible for their actions and choices. By consciously involving older citizens, particularly those that are most vulnerable, in the participation process and by giving them equal voice/power, planners are fulfilling a moral responsibility.

It is critical for the planner to be a communications expert, not only in the sense of communicating technical analyses and recommendations, but also in the sense of organizing, facilitating, and managing an effective communication process. In other words, the planner must manage community discourse, which is an important role vis-à-vis all citizens, but particular attention needs to be given to older adults involved in the process who are a varied population with a range of incomes, skills, impairments, and behavioral traits. Just as it would not be expected to find the same interests expressed by a 20 year-

old and a 40 year-old, it should not be expected that a 65 year-old has the same interests or needs as an 80 or 100 year-old individual. It is important to view older adults as a spectrum of individuals with different orientations and with differing ways of communicating these interests, needs, and visions.

Reaching out to all members of the community and directly engaging them “with their society” (xvii) so that they obtain a sense of competence is a basic premise of the theory of transactive planning proposed by Friedmann in 1973. This then-radical approach to planning is deeply rooted in face-to-face, person-centered dialogue within relatively small groups. He states that it is the moral responsibility of planners to encourage those affected parties to have voice, and since planning concerns the use of knowledge in action, planners must possess a relevant knowledge of society. Accepting older citizens as important and equal participants provides planners with an opportunity to overcome some of the impediments to effective communication. Friedmann also discusses social exchange theory where each participant acts as both a receiver and sender of information.

Communicative action builds upon this early work of Friedmann that emphasizes social learning between planners and participants as an essential part of the planning process. The key to communicative action is dialogue – and the key to good public participation is social interaction based on dialogue. In his most recent work, Forester (1999) discusses the importance of the skillful deliberative planner in facilitating a practical and timely participatory planning process. He further states “when planners deliberate well, they alter that space (of interests) and may then transform themselves and enable participants to grow (to be empowered) in the process” (p. 269). With deliberative planning, relationships can be built among participants, and older adults can be further

empowered to attain a higher level of political equality in the planning arena. Forester, like Friedmann, stresses learning through participation by listening and interdependence. If older citizens are made to feel that they are truly being heard and that their identity is recognized, their willingness to participate will be increased. Howe et al. (1994) have provided guidelines for improving communication skills with older participants which take these age-related changes into account in an attempt to ensure maximum involvement.

Methodology

Study Site

For several reasons it has been determined that the focus of this descriptive study is the state of Florida. In consideration of the focus of this research, it was important to select a place that could serve as a model for planning for older adults. With its history of being a major retirement haven and with its position of being one of the first states to adopt a comprehensive planning act in 1975, Florida should be the vanguard in the U.S in both issues related to the older population and those associated with planning.

Florida, among other states, is recognized as being more progressive within the planning profession by having advanced into much broader and more future-oriented state planning enabling legislation (Smith, 1993). Consequently, there is a stronger state role in directing local governments in planning and land-use controls through statutes that require local jurisdictions to prepare and adopt comprehensive plans. In addition, these state mandates include requirements for citizen participation in the process of preparing and updating these plans.

Relating to older adults, Florida's population has aged ahead of the rest of the nation, making it a bellwether state in which to observe age trends and impacts (McManus, 1996). In 1990, 18 percent of Florida's population was 65 years and older,

and by 2010 it will have the largest percentage of residents 65 or older in any state – 20 percent. Three percent of the state’s population will be 85 years or older in 2010, compared to two percent nationally. In 1984, the Florida Committee on Aging was formed with the mission to draw a blueprint for action by the year 2000 to create and implement innovative aging services and strategies to meet the aging demographic imperative. Recently, the State Department of Elder Affairs (DOEA) has undertaken an elder-ready communities initiative with pilot projects currently in Brevard County, Tamarac, and the city of Jacksonville. This will be a voluntary program in which participating jurisdictions will assess their elder-friendliness using a *Report Card* produced by DOEA.¹

Subjects for Study

The sample to be studied consists of 30 local jurisdictions with comprehensive plans prepared under the state planning mandate in Florida (see Table 1). These governments were selected for study in an earlier NSF grant which involved investigating state planning mandates. The 30 local governments from each state include towns, cities, and counties that were randomly selected from a list of all jurisdictions having, among other common characteristics, a boundary tangential to the Atlantic Ocean or Gulf of Mexico. Figure 1, which follows Table 2, shows the location of

¹ Another important consideration is the fact that as part of a research team that is working on a grant awarded by the National Science Foundation (NSF), I was in Florida during summer 1999 gathering data related to that proposal which provided an excellent opportunity to link my research directly to that project. The NSF questionnaire was administered to the same planning officials in the same 30 jurisdictions that comprise the sample for this research.

the places in Florida that comprise the study sample. A detailed description of the criteria used in the initial selection of local governments can be found in *Making Governments Plan* (Burby & May, 1997). Since each of these governments willingly participated in the earlier rounds of data collection related to the NSF project, it was anticipated that there would be no reduction in the sample size.

Table 1. Florida jurisdictions and their 1998 estimated population.

<u>Jurisdiction</u>	<u>Estimated Population</u> <u>July 1, 1998</u>	<u>Jurisdiction</u>	<u>Estimated Population</u> <u>July 1, 1998</u>
Atlantic Beach	12960	Martin County	115949
Bradenton	47049	Mary Esther	4290
Cape Canaveral	8626	Miami Shores	9983
Cocoa	18508	Naples	19404
Dania Beach	15162	Niceville	11973
Deerfield Beach	50921	North Palm Beach	12398
Delray Beach	53618	Oldsmar	10287
Destin	11021	Ormond Beach	33060
Fort Lauderdale	153728	Palm Bay	77486
Holly Hill	11529	Pinellas County	877273
Jacksonville	693630	Pompano Beach	75982
Jupiter	30970	Sarasota	51035
Longboat Key	6310	St. Augustine	11998
Lynn Haven	12604	St. Petersburg	238533
Manatee County	239629	Valparaiso	6615

* Population Estimates for Places: Annual Time Series, July 1,1990 to July 1,1998
Source: Population Estimates Program, Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC

Once the sample was selected, the 1998 estimated population for each place was retrieved (Table 1) to understand the range in size of the sample locales from Mary Esther (4290) to Pinellas County (877273). It was also important to derive the percentage of the population in each place that is 65 years old and above. Table 2 presents this information, which was calculated from the 1990 Census data (no interim Census data on this variable is available on the place or county level). As can be seen, there is much variation in the percent of people 65 years and older, from Mary Esther

with 7.3% to Longboat Key with 55.4% Further analysis of this data, including spatial, will be done at the next stage of this project. The critical fact for this study is that each of these characteristics of the places could affect the degree of effort that the planning department expended in involving the older residents in the process of updating the comprehensive plan.

Table 2. Florida jurisdictions – 1990 population and percent 65 years old and over.*

<u>Jurisdiction</u>	<u>1990 Population</u>	<u>1990 Population 65 Years and ></u>	<u>%Population 65 Years and></u>
Atlantic Beach	11636	1004	8.6
Bradenton	43779	12464	28.5
Cape Canaveral	8014	1293	16.1
Cocoa	17691	2183	12.3
Dania Beach	13024	2830	21.7
Deerfield Beach	46325	16788	36.2
Delray Beach	47181	14984	31.8
Destin	8080	1147	14.2
Fort Lauderdale	149377	26753	17.9
Holly Hill	11141	2710	24.3
Jacksonville	635230	67574	10.6
Jupiter	24986	4320	17.3
Longboat Key	5904	3270	55.4
Lynn Haven	9298	1016	10.9
Manatee County	211707	59360	28.0
Martin County	100900	27716	27.5
Mary Esther	4139	304	7.3
Miami Shores	10084	1716	17.0
Naples	19505	8184	42.0
Niceville	10507	918	8.7
North Palm Beach	11343	3723	32.8
Oldsmar	8361	998	11.9
Ormond Beach	29721	7456	25.1
Palm Bay	62632	6750	10.8
Pinellas County	851659	221564	26.0
Pompano Beach	72411	18304	25.3
Sarasota	50978	12843	25.2
St. Augustine	11692	2418	20.7
St. Petersburg	238629	53004	22.2
Valparaiso	4672	494	10.6

* U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC

With only 30 cases in the sample, it is recognized that issues related to statistical significance and lack of statistical power could arise as I proceed with my dissertation research using explanatory analysis to examine the effects of planners' effort on plan elder-friendliness. Since the sample of 30 jurisdictions is not representative, caution would need to be taken in any attempt to generalize to the population of all cities in the U.S. or even to those jurisdictions with mandated comprehensive plans.

The Survey

A questionnaire was developed by the researcher to determine the degree of effort that planners made in involving older residents in the plan-making process, specifically in the update of the Comprehensive Plan for each locale (see Appendix I). Effort has been defined as the earnest attempt by planners to involve (older) citizens in the plan-making process through substantial expenditure of time and energy by consciously taking into account the techniques used, accommodations (meeting place, provision for transportation, etc.), objectives, timing, participants, and technical information disseminated. Measurement of effort along these dimensions is used in the instrument.

The predominance of the questions are direct closed-ended followed by open-ended questions depending on the responses to the first part of the question. The majority of the questions are in the yes-no format with two questions having a Likert response scale. Measurement simply involves adding the yes responses (yes = 1) and no responses (no = 0) to form an index of effort. The greater the number of yes responses, the greater the effort of planners to involve older citizens in the planning process.

I visited half of the locales in the sample during summer 1999 to administer the questionnaire to planning staff involved in the citizen participation process. The same questionnaire was administered by mail to planning staff in the remaining jurisdictions during the following months. In soliciting responses from these public employees, their anonymity was assured; therefore, in discussing the results of the survey, there are no direct links made between individual responses and places or people. All 30 of the completed questionnaires were returned; a 100 percent return rate. In cases where the planner did not provide a response to a question, I telephoned the respondent to fill any missing data, so that all data were available. It is important to note that the questionnaire asked exactly the same questions of all informants and in the same order. This produced raw data that has been treated in the same way for all cases – converted into scores or categorized according to rules set out in my coding frame. The result is a score or value that can be quantified for each informant.

Quantifying the data was the first step in analysis, and in order to do this I developed code categories for the questionnaire responses and constructed a codebook with variable and code assignments. The next step in the process was entering the data into SPSS, after which various statistical tests were run on the data file. In situations where the respondent was asked to provide information by listing or describing, a logbook was created to file and store those responses. The output has been interpreted and a description of the results regarding the degree of planners' efforts in promoting participation by older citizens in the planning process is given.

Results

As stated earlier, this research is part of a larger study where the main focus is to determine the relationship between the elder-friendliness of comprehensive plans and the degree of effort planners make in involving older citizens in the plan-making process. The purpose of this paper is to describe the results of the questionnaire that was administered to planning officials in the 30 places comprising the sample, which is a key independent variable in my dissertation research. Since these are preliminary findings, I will also discuss some possible alternative reasons for the results.

The first tests that I ran on the data were frequencies and percentages for each question in the survey. The yes-no percentages for each question are presented in the questionnaire included in Appendix I. Nine of the 30 respondents (30 percent) indicated that their planning department did a demographic analysis prior to starting the citizen participation element of updating the comprehensive plan. So consequently, only nine jurisdictions did any sort of age breakdown in the analysis. This is puzzling since the State mandate requires that Florida jurisdictions conduct a demographic analysis as part of the process. Perhaps the phrase "prior to beginning the citizen participation element" resulted in relatively low affirmative responses.

Half of the jurisdictions indicated that they considered older adults as a group with special needs that should be considered in the comprehensive plan. I was particularly interested in the most important needs of older adults. Table 3 displays the special needs of older citizens with which the planners in the sample listed as those of most concern.

Table 3. Special needs of older adults listed by planning departments.

<u>Older Adults' Special Needs</u>	<u>Percent of Respondents</u>
Housing (affordability and availability of appropriate)	20.0
Recreation/leisure services	13.3
Transportation	13.3
Access to medical services	10.0
Pedestrian movement/mobility	10.0
Access to public facilities	6.7
Emergency services/evacuation needs	3.3
Interconnectivity	3.3

These are all needs that can be addressed as part of the planning process. It will be interesting to see if and how each jurisdiction responded to these concerns in their respective comprehensive plans.

The next question asked if the planning department targeted older residents of the jurisdiction for involvement in the planning process – five places (16.7%) responded yes. One place with a no response wrote “we target all citizen participation, no different methods used”, and another wrote “our population is largely retiree, no special efforts are needed”. I then included 13 ways to outreach to citizens in general and asked if they used any of the techniques listed to involve older citizens. Four of the outreach mechanisms were not used by anyone [advertising in public transportation (such as buses, subway, or lightrail), telephone solicitation, magazines, and outdoor advertising (such as kiosks)], although it is not surprising since these are perhaps the most innovative and also may not be applicable to certain places. Many of the jurisdictions use from one to three of the other techniques. The most commonly used mechanisms for targeting older residents is sending a letter to the citizens association and/or the local age-based interest group; however, only four planning departments (13.3%) in the sample used this technique (see Table 4).

Table 4. Mechanisms to target older citizens to participate.

<u>Target Mechanism</u>	<u>Percent of Respondents</u>
Letter to citizens association and/or age-based interest group	13.3
Newspaper	10.0
Bill Stuffer	10.0
Flyers	10.0
Radio	6.7
Weekly planning commission agenda	6.7
Television	3.3
Direct mail	3.3
Special announcement	3.3
Magazine	0
Outdoor announcement	0
Public transportation	0
Telephone Solicitation	0

Questions 4 and 13 are closely related in that they pertain to whether the department coordinated with any age-based interest groups and/or elder service providers during the update process. Few of the respondents (#4-6.7% and #13-10%) involved these groups, with the local Area Agency on Aging/Council on Aging most often mentioned.

Questions 5 and 14 also are related. They asked if a planning staff member spoke to any groups of older persons to explain the planning process (5) and whether there is a planner on staff who is trained in and/or knowledgeable of how to best plan for older citizens (14). The data seem to confirm the relationship since departments from eight places (26.7%) spoke to an older group and nine departments (30%) believe they have a knowledgeable person on staff. One respondent who said yes to Question 14 further added "perhaps knowledge is somewhat limited, but sensitivity is high". This is an important statement in that it indicates a heightened awareness level, which is one of the goals of this research.

The list of eight items indicating any special efforts the planning department may have used to accommodate the unique needs of older participants was adapted from *Planning for an Aging Society* (Howe et al., 1994). The responses are presented in the table below.

Table 5. Special effort used to accommodate older participants.

<u>Special Effort</u>	<u>Percent of Respondents</u>
Accessibility of building and meeting room	56.7
Use of TTY, TDD, and/or microphone	50.0
Selection of meeting place	30.0
Time(s) of meetings held	16.7
Way meeting conducted	6.7
Transportation provided	3.3
Participation techniques used	3.3
Dissemination of technical information	3.3

Several interesting findings resulted from this question. The reason for the comparatively high yes responses for selection of meeting place (Q6a) and accessibility of building and meeting room (Q6d) is because of the requirements of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) as indicated by the written comments of many respondents. In other words, not to better accommodate older participants necessarily, but to respond to legal mandates, although it is generally agreed upon that older people as well as others do benefit by these important accessibility laws. In addition to what is required by ADA, there are a number of other modifications that can be made to the physical environment which make public participation easier for older people. Hearing, sight, mobility, and the ability to process information are affected by aging, and some impairment in one or more of these areas can be expected. Howe et al. (1994) have provided guidelines for improving

communication skills with older participants which take these age-related changes into account in an attempt to ensure maximum involvement.

Another technique listed that can better accommodate older participants as well as others, who may not hear as well or speak as loudly, is the use of microphones, TTY or TDD during public meetings. Although 15 respondents said that such was used, five planners said that the equipment was available "upon request" or "only if requested in advance". It is possible that by making the perspective participant have to call and request special equipment could negatively affect their willingness to be involved. A few of the places held their meetings at times that might better accommodate older people, meaning mid-morning or daytime and early evening. One place indicated that they were conscious of the font size of the graphics for handouts and other visuals used during meetings, which indicates a sensitivity to older eyes.

Half of the respondents used a citizen's advisory committee or similar group to work with planning staff during the process of updating the comprehensive plan. None of those who had an advisory committee consciously included an older adult or an individual representing an age-based interest group. This was most surprising to me, although perhaps in some jurisdictions the advisory committee selected is already representative of this sector of the population and therefore a conscious effort is not needed.

Questions 8 and 9 relate in that they are essentially asking if the planning department specifically outreached to residents living in retirement communities and to residents of assisted-living and nursing facilities. It is interesting in both cases that, if there is a retirement community within the planning jurisdiction (there were 22), only three departments outreached to those citizens and only two departments outreached to

more confined and less mobile citizens living in more supportive environments. In some cases, the planner wrote that retirement communities are handled just like any other homeowner's association. To the question of how do you go about involving residents of assisted-living/retirement facilities, one respondent indicated that in his/her jurisdiction, all planning meetings are televised.

Howe et al. (1994) notes that frail elderly people (often poor and infirm with little family support – the truly vulnerable) are less likely to participate in the citizen participation process. It is important, though, that they be represented, if not in person, then by advocates like social service agencies, the area agency on aging, or nonprofit service providers. Local agencies who are concerned with issues related to the older population should be contacted during the planning process to encourage their participation.

The majority of respondents (86.7%) saw no barriers to full participation by older citizens in the plan-making process. One planner stated that the fact that the meetings were scheduled at night could have posed a barrier. Interestingly, another respondent said that "patience on their part. Inability to grasp new technology. Mind set of keeping "others" out of their areas" were barriers; implying that the barriers were created by the older participants themselves. Only 10% (3 respondents) said that older participants raised any age-related issues during this process. The issues raised include: parking accessibility to public and commercial areas, housing, transportation, environment, fear of cost exceeding income, and access to health care.

There are two questions that provide opportunities for the responding planner to do ratings: #10 asked them how they would rate participation by older citizens in the plan-making process with that of those in other age groups. Along a scale from much lower = 1 to similar = 3 to much higher = 5, the mean was 3.6 with a standard

deviation of .8550. Of the total respondents, 76.6% felt that older citizens participate at similar to higher rates than others. Ten percent (3 respondents) said they participated at lower rates, and interestingly, only 13.3% (4 respondents) said they participated at much higher rates. Two planners who rated their older citizen participation occurring at higher rates than other age groups in the community, provided useful comments: “we have an active older citizenry that makes a point of being involved, so we have never felt that any type of special outreach was necessary” and “hard to determine because we have a higher elderly population as a retirement community”.

The final question asked planners to rate the degree their comprehensive plan adequately represents the needs and visions of older citizens in their jurisdiction. The rating scale is from poor = 1 to average = 3 to excellent = 5. The following table indicates the range of responses given.

Table 6. Perceived rating of plan elder-friendliness.

<u>Rating</u>	<u>Percent of Respondents</u>
Poor	3.3
Fair	6.7
Average	40.0
Good	36.7
Excellent	13.3

The mean score for the plan rating is 3.5 with a standard deviation of .9377. Forty percent of the respondents rate their plan as average, and 36.7% rate it as good. Two planners, who rated their plans as good, said it represents that age group as well as all groups in the city. Only one and two respondents rated their plan as poor and fair, respectively. This particular variable which measures the planner’s perception of how elder-friendly their plan will be correlated at a later stage in this process with the actual degree of elder-friendliness of the comprehensive plans for each of the places.

The next step involved a look at overall effort of planning departments to involve their older citizens in the process to update the comprehensive plan. To do this, I created an additive index of effort by using 10 indicators (by adding the responses for the 10 questions that specifically indicate “effort” – see Appendix II). Table 7 indicates the results of this analysis.

Table 7. Index of overall effort to involve older citizens in the plan-making process.

<u>Indicator of Effort</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
0	2	6.7
1	9	30.0
2	5	16.7
3	7	23.3
4	3	10.0
5	2	6.7
6	1	3.3
7	1	3.3
Total	30	100.0

With a range of actual scores from 0 to 7 in the 10-item effort index, the mean is 2.5 and the standard deviation is 1.74. As can be seen from the table, planners from two of the jurisdictions in the sample did not indicate any effort in involving older citizens; while on the high-end of the effort index, only two jurisdictions (6.6%) scored 6 and 7. As a reliability check on the effort index, a Pearson correlation was calculated using Question 15 which relates to the perceived rating of the comprehensive plans for their adequacy in representing the needs and visions of older citizens and the effort index. It is expected that the higher the effort to involve older people, the higher the perceived rating of plan elder-friendliness; however, the low correlation was statistically insignificant ($r = .286, p > .05$). Therefore, these variables do not appear to be associated.

The preliminary findings from this study confirm results from earlier research which indicate that planners have generally neglected older citizens in the plan-making process. There could be some explanations for this oversight other than pure neglect. These include such issues as the size and expertise of the planning staff, which normally relates to the size of the jurisdiction (see Table 1); the percentage of the population that is 65 years of age and older (see Table 2); an historically high level of participation by older residents in planning processes; the requirements for citizen participation as part of the comprehensive plan update process contained in the Florida mandate; among others. These alternative explanations will be explored in depth during the next stage of this research.

Conclusions and Implications for Planning

As the inevitable aging of community inhabitants occurs, it is essential that planners recognize older adults as a group within the population that is concerned with specific planning needs. We need to know the degree of effort planners expend to involve older citizens in the plan-making process. In other words, have planners truly heard the voice of older residents and sincerely and thoroughly considered their needs and visions in formulating plan goals and policies? This study provides some preliminary answers to this important questions.

If demographic transitions and the special needs that accompany aging are better understood by planners then local population changes can be roughly predicted and a proactive approach to addressing the needs of an aging population can begin. There must be a move away from *managing the status quo* to a greater emphasis on *planning for change*. With an awareness of the characteristics of an aging population and the conscious involvement of older citizens in the plan-making process, community

planners can produce more elder-friendly plans which will result in creating environments that are conducive to the physical, social, psychological needs of older residents. This will contribute significantly to building better communities for all people.

There is much opportunity for planners to affect change. It is the nature of the profession to coordinate, facilitate, act as a resource to the community, and to consider both the physical surroundings and the social concerns within communities. Not only are issues related to an aging population relevant to community planners in their day-to-day planning activities, but community planners may also be in a position to play a significant role in coordinating and facilitating much of the change that is required within maturing neighborhoods to enable older residents to age in place. Very few professions offer this opportunity. By consciously encouraging older residents to be involved in the citizen participation process and sincerely listening to what they have to say, planners can begin to adequately and effectively address the real needs of these citizens and create communities that are more elder-friendly and therefore more livable for everyone.

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APPENDIX I

ID_____

Community_____

Participation by Older Adults in the Plan-Making Process

1. Did your department do a demographic analysis of the community prior to beginning the citizen participation element of the plan-making process to determine the numbers of citizens who are in different age groups?
 - 1 no 70%
 - 2 yes 30%
 - a. What age breakdowns did you use in your analysis?

2. Does your department consider older adults to be a group with special needs that should be considered in the comprehensive plan?
 - 1 no 50%
 - 2 yes 50%
 - a. What needs have you been most concerned with?

3. Do you specifically target those citizens 65 years and older to participate in the planning process?
 - 1 no 83.3%
 - 2 yes 13.3%
 - a. How are older citizens targeted?
 - 1 letter to citizens association and/or age-based interest group
 - 2 newspaper
 - 3 television
 - 4 direct mail
 - 5 bill stuffer (include in water or electric bill)
 - 6 radio
 - 7 magazine
 - 8 outdoor announcement, i.e. on kiosks

- 9 specialty announcement, i.e. signs in public facilities, supermarkets, places of worship
- 10 flyers
- 11 public transportation, such as buses, subway lightrail
- 12 weekly planning commission agenda
- 13 telephone solicitation
- 14 other

4. Did you invite any age-based interest groups, such as the Alliance on Aging, OWL, AARP, etc. to participate in your public involvement efforts?

- 1 no 93.3%
- 2 yes 6.7%

a. Which ones?

5. Did a member of the planning staff speak to any groups of older persons to explain the planning process?

- 1 no 73.3%
- 2 yes 26.7%

6. Did you make any special efforts in the areas listed to accommodate the unique needs of older adults as part of the citizen participation process? If so, please describe in detail.

a. Selection of meeting place(s)

- 1 no 70%
- 2 yes 30%

1. Describe

b. Time(s) meetings held

- 1 no 83.3%
- 2 yes 16.7%

1. Describe

c. Transportation provided

1 no 96.7%

2 yes 3.3%

1. Describe

d. Accessibility of building and meeting room

1 no 43.3%

2 yes 56.7%

1. Describe

e. Participation techniques used

1 no 96.7%

2 yes 3.3%

1. Describe

f. Way meeting conducted

1 no 93.3%

2 yes 6.7%

1. Describe

g. Dissemination of technical information

1 no 96.7%

2 yes 3.3%

1. Describe

- h. Use of TTY, TDD, and/or microphone for the hearing-impaired
 - 1 no 50%
 - 2 yes 50%
 - 1. Describe

- h. Other?

- 7. Did you form a citizen's advisory committee or similar group to work with planning staff during the plan-making process?
 - 1 no 50%
 - 2 yes 50%
 - a. Did you consciously include an older adult and/or an individual representing an age-based interest group?
 - 1 no 100%
 - 2 yes 100%

- 8. Is there an age-restricted or retirement community within the planning jurisdiction?
 - 1 no 26.7%
 - 2 yes 73.3%
 - a. Did your staff specifically outreach to the citizens who live there for their participation?
 - 1 no 90%
 - 2 yes 10%
 - a. How was this done?

- 9. Did you outreach to those older citizens who are no longer mobile, whether living at home or in a more supportive living arrangement (i.e. assisted-living or nursing residence)?

1 no 93.3%

2 yes 6.7%

a. How did you go about involving them in the process?

10. Did you find that older citizens, in general, participate in the plan-making process at much lower, lower, similar, higher, or much higher rates as other age groups in your population?

1 Much lower 0.0%

2 Lower 10.0%

3 Similar 33.3%

4 Higher 43.3%

5 Much higher 13.3%

11. Do you see any barriers to full participation of older adults in the plan-making process?

1 no 86.7%

2 yes 13.3%

a. What are they?

12. Did older participants raise any specific age-related issues during the planning process?

1 no 90%

2 yes 10%

a. Explain

13. During the plan-making process, did you coordinate with the local Council on Aging/Area Agency on Aging or other service providers and caregivers to the older population?

- 1 no 90%
 - 2 yes 10%
 - a. Who and at what stage in the process?
 - b. What did you learn from them?
14. Do you have a planner on your staff who is trained in and/or knowledgeable of the special needs of older adults and planning issues related to an aging population?
- 1 no 70%
 - 2 yes 30%
15. How do you rate the degree that the comprehensive plan adequately represents the needs and visions of older citizens in your jurisdiction? Would you rate it as
- 1 Excellent 13.3%
 - 2 Good 36.7%
 - 3 Average 40.0%
 - 4 Fair 6.7%
 - 5 Poor 3.3%

APPENDIX II

Indicators of Effort = Index of Overall Effort

1. Did your department do a demographic analysis of the community prior to beginning the citizen participation element of the plan-making process to determine the numbers of citizens who are in different age groups?
2. Does your department consider older adults to be a group with special needs that should be considered in the comprehensive plan?
3. Do you specifically target those citizens 65 years and older to participate in the planning process?
4. Did you invite any age-based interest groups, such as the Alliance on Aging, OWL, AARP, etc. to participate in your public involvement efforts?
5. Did a member of the planning staff speak to any groups of older persons to explain the planning process?
6. Did you make any special efforts in the areas listed to accommodate the unique needs of older adults as part of the citizen participation process? If so, please describe in detail.
7. Did you consciously include an older adult and/or an individual representing an age-based interest group?
8. Did you outreach to those older citizens who are no longer mobile, whether living at home or in a more supportive living arrangement (i.e. assisted-living or nursing residence)?
9. During the plan-making process, did you coordinate with the local Council on Aging/Area Agency on Aging or other service providers and caregivers to the older population?
10. Do you have a planner on your staff who is trained in and/or knowledgeable of the special needs of older adults and planning issues related to an aging population?