

“Aging in Place Communities” by Toby F. Laping, PH.D.
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From Boston in the east to Los Angeles in the west and in dozens of communities in between, seniors are banding together to use the strength of their numbers to get the services they need in order to remain living in their homes.

These seniors often describe themselves as aging in place or sometimes as living in NORCs (naturally occurring retirement communities), defined as neighborhoods where residents remain for years and age as neighbors. These can be as small as single apartment buildings, or a block of homes, or as large as neighborhoods. There are different models but the basic concept for these naturally aging communities is simple and consistent: provision of diverse, often non-medical services to people who are living in their own homes and who have joined together with a goal of remaining in those homes despite occasional illnesses and general decline, as opposed to moving to institutions or care complexes.

These aging in place groups typically form in cities where there's a high density of seniors. Although there are some programs in rural and exurban communities, most aging in place communities are in cities because geographical closeness helps ease transportation difficulties, to increase access for group activities, to make neighbor to neighbor assistance easier, and to encourage providers to reduce rates because of the potential benefit from economies of scale.

Annual fees are charged, typically ranging from some hundreds of dollars to less than \$1,000, in return for which one generally can access some services provided free to members and other services that often carry fees which are reduced for members.

While each aging in place group has its own structure, services provided to members can include transportation, meals provided by neighbors or purchased from local restaurants and delivered, plants watered, pets walked, exercise groups, companions, friendly visiting, access to handymen and cleaning people who have been vetted, group social functions including tours, help with paperwork and bill paying, teaching of computer skills, blood pressure checks, etc.

In general, people are expected to help and to be helped or, as one group phrases it, to be a good neighbor. These groups often formalize the casual relationships that many of us already have, and that formalization serves the useful purpose of insuring continuity.

This is not a magic bullet. However, I am convinced that Buffalo has an aging populations primed for such a project, and many people with whom I've spoken are in agreement. It will be interesting to see whether this concept appeals to many readers.