

General observations

LONGEVITY ECONOMY/AGE-FRIENDLY PLANNING

Downtown Rochester, Minnesota, has unique and high-potential opportunities to benefit from the longevity economy. With the Mayo Clinic at its core, and the Destination Medical Center (DMC) initiative transforming the area, downtown is positioned to become a national leader in serving the aging population. Around 46% of downtown residents are 55+. In adjacent core neighborhoods 55+ at around 30%. This does not include Mayo Clinic patients who are older and elder adults. Additionally, family caregivers are increasing in number both those of residents and accompanying Mayo Clinic patients.

Here are some longevity/age-friendly opportunities for downtown Rochester:

Develop an Age-Friendly Eco-System in Rochester

A comprehensive and interconnected network of policies, services, environments, and social structures designed to create environments, policies, and services that support healthy aging, well-being, and active participation in community life.

The major elements of the eco-system would be: Public Health | Workplaces | Home and Community-Based Services | Community, City, County | Education & Research | Healthcare Systems

Longevity, Health and Wellness Innovation Hub

Create and attract businesses that serve older adults through cutting-edge health tech, diagnostics, and wellness. Discovery Square is already attracting biotech and med-tech ventures—make aging a strategic vertical.

Integrate longevity-focused startups into the Discovery Square district.

Expand clinics, diagnostics labs, and telehealth services for preventive aging care.

Incentivize businesses in assistive tech, mobility aids, home care platforms, and AI-driven health monitoring.

Host longevity-focused health summits or innovation accelerators.

Age-Friendly Retail and Hospitality

Develop a downtown retail, dining, and service ecosystem optimized for adults 50+. Older tourists, caregivers, and long-stay Mayo patients' families often spend weeks downtown and influence spending patterns.

Encourage universal design in storefronts (e.g., no steps, wider aisles, clear signage).

Launch certified age-friendly business programs to train staff in senior service excellence.

Curate dining, arts, and entertainment that align with preferences of older adults.

Develop "slow shopping" zones, rest areas, accessible public bathrooms, and valet services.

Senior-Optimized Housing and Living

Build or retrofit downtown housing that supports aging-in-place and intergenerational living. These developments attract retirees, traveling seniors, and Mayo-affiliated professionals planning for the long term.

Encourage senior-friendly condos, co-housing, or luxury assisted living within walkable zones.

Incentivize accessory dwelling units (ADUs) or multigenerational housing in nearby neighborhoods.

Provide financial and regulatory support for developers to create mixed-use housing with wraparound services.

Lifelong Learning and Engagement

Position downtown as a hub for older adults to keep learning, working, and connecting. Older adults in Rochester are well-educated, civically engaged, and often seeking purposeful work or mentorship opportunities.

Partner with the University of Minnesota Rochester (UMR) to offer certificate programs or “Senior Scholars” learning tracks.

Create co-working spaces for 50+ entrepreneurs, consultants, and nonprofit leaders.

Develop volunteerism pipelines through the Experience Corps, museums, arts centers, and health navigation roles.

Transportation and Mobility Services

Implement seamless, age-friendly transit for easier access to downtown services. Transportation is a top barrier to downtown access for older adults; solving this boosts commerce and inclusion.

Design the Link Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system and sidewalks with aging in mind: level boarding, benches, real-time info.

Create microtransit or senior shuttle loops connecting downtown with major senior housing sites.

Subsidize e-bike share or ride-hailing credits for seniors to use local services.

Caregiver Support and Respite Services

Make downtown a hub for supporting family caregivers and professional home care workers. 100s (1000s?) of family caregivers come downtown daily to support loved ones.

Develop respite care centers, adult day programs, and caregiver lounges within walking distance of Mayo.

Incentivize pop-up services like massage, mental health and spiritual counseling, and care navigation kiosks.

Provide discounted access to downtown amenities for caregivers of Mayo patients and local residents.

Destination Aging Tourism

Market downtown as a premier U.S. destination for healthy aging and medical tourism.

Curate "aging well" tourism packages: preventive checkups at Mayo, downtown spa & wellness, culinary experiences, seminars.

Partner with hotels to create extended-stay senior suites with home care support.

Offer concierge services for long-stay patients and their families.

WHAT WOULD IT MEAN FOR ROCHESTER TO BE “AMERICA’S CITY FOR HEALTH”

Rochester, MN truly embracing the title “America’s City for Health” through the lens of longevity and older/elder adults means more than medical excellence. It means creating a city where people don’t just live longer but live better, with dignity, purpose, and connection as they age. Being America’s City for Health means meeting people where they are, not only where they are treated. To be America’s City for Health, Rochester must become a city where aging is not perceived as crisis but as a strength. That means creating a place where people can live longer, live well, and belong at every age.

A Longevity Society and Livable City

- Safe, affordable housing
- Reliable transportation
- Access to community-based care
- Opportunities for social connection, movement, and purpose
- Systems that support independence and dignity

A Model of Age-Friendly Urban Design

Streets, buildings, and public spaces built with universal design

Intergenerational housing in vibrant, walkable neighborhoods

Benches, shade, lighting, wayfinding—designed for all bodies and abilities

Access to nature and movement built into the fabric of the city

Health Impact: Promotes active aging and independence; reduces falls, hospitalizations, and social isolation.

An Integrated Network of Care

A health system that blends clinical excellence (Mayo) with home- and community-based services (like FSR)

Coordinated support for family caregivers, including respite, navigation, and workplace flexibility

On-demand access to behavioral health, home visits, nutrition, and social support

Health Impact: Extends healthy lifespan and reduces avoidable ER visits, hospital stays, and institutionalization.

A Longevity Workforce and Innovation Hub

Education and job training in the care economy, aging tech, and social work

Incubators for age-tech startups (e.g. remote care, fall detection, medication management)

Local employers offering flexible, caregiving-supportive policies

Health Impact: Tackles workforce shortages and repositions Rochester as a national leader in longevity innovation.

A Community Where Aging Means Belonging

Programming that connects older adults to arts, volunteerism, and civic life

Intergenerational initiatives in schools, libraries, and cultural spaces

Digital inclusion so older adults aren't left behind in the connected world

Health Impact: Reduces depression and isolation, fosters community pride, and builds a culture of mutual respect.

A Leader in Equity Across the Lifespan

Special focus on underserved older adults: low-income, rural, BIPOC, LGBTQ+, veterans

Age-friendly policies embedded in housing, transit, public safety, and zoning

A data-driven approach to closing health and service gaps across neighborhoods

Health Impact: Ensures health is not a privilege of geography, race, or wealth—but a shared city value.

Additional Charette Comments:

DMC 10 YEAR UPDATE PRINCIPLES: LONGEVITY ECONOMY/AGE FRIENDLY PLANNING

Longevity and age-friendly planning can help the Destination Medical Center (DMC) achieve its updated vision of health in design, attraction, and inclusive growth as outlined in its 10-year update. Aligning policy, design, and investment decisions with the real experiences of older adults, caregivers, and multigenerational communities. Here are some potential longevity and age-friendly contributions:

Health in Design - how public spaces and infrastructure support well-being

Designing with all ages in mind creates places that work for everyone, not just the mobile or youthful. Public realm elements like wide sidewalks, rest areas, curb cuts, slower traffic, and good lighting especially benefit older adults and are universally appreciated.

Restorative public spaces (like Peace Plaza or Central Park) can incorporate intergenerational seating, shade structures, walking loops, and sensory gardens proven to reduce stress, support social connection, and aid cognitive health in seniors.

Walkable access to essential services (transit, health care, housing, groceries) gives older adults independence, lowers social isolation, and aligns with public health and climate goals.

Health as an Attractor- what makes Rochester a place where people and talent want to be

An age-inclusive community attracts talent of all ages — not just young professionals, but also mid-career experts, caregivers, and retirees who bring capital, mentorship, and civic engagement.

Senior-optimized infrastructure (transit, housing, retail) signals to residents and visitors that Rochester is a city where lifelong thriving is possible — for patients and for professionals.

Aging well as a lifestyle brand: Rochester can position itself as the place where people go not just to be treated, but to age well — integrating Mayo's world-class care with accessible cultural, wellness, and residential experiences.

Health as a Growth Engine - how growth can benefit more people and support a strong regional economy

Older adults are a major economic force: In Minnesota, those 50+ drive over 57% of consumer spending and support 1.7 million jobs. Investing in infrastructure and services for this group means direct economic return. Transfer payments (e.g., Social Security) contribute significantly to local economy.

Supporting aging in place reduces public cost burdens from institutional care while generating local jobs in home health, modifications, and senior services.

Aging-inclusive workforce strategies (flexible roles, caregiver supports, older adult upskilling) retain knowledge and widen the labor pool — vital as retirements outpace workforce growth.

Age-friendly small businesses (from boutique fitness to local caregiving tech) add economic diversification beyond healthcare.