

9.1B Action applied to 7.1 Action: Apply the Completed Sustainable CT Equity Toolkit to 7.1 Hold a Sustainability Event – the Darien Farmers’ Market.

WHO LIVES AND WORKS IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

One of the groups identified in our survey is the Darien seniors. This group has two sub-groups, those who are still independent and those who need support.

In 2015, Darien’s senior population (60+ years old) was approximately 3,800, and was expected to grow by 26% over the following 10 years, according to the Partnership for Strong Communities. On the other end of the spectrum, Darien had about 2,600 children under 15 (4,700 under 20). The balance of the town’s population between the ages of 20 and 59 amounted to some 10,100 residents.

Darien has stepped up in a big way to serve the growing senior population, as witnessed by the new Senior Center and its annual budget of nearly \$400,000. In 2011, members of the town community who wanted to help make it possible for Darien seniors to remain in town and in their homes formed a new nonprofit organization, At Home In Darien, by merging two other, related nonprofits which had started in 2009. The town’s Human Services Department has been coordinating its services with both of the aforementioned organizations.

When the Advisory Committee on Sustainability sought to apply the Equity Tool Kit to “7.1 Hold a Sustainability Event,” we were fortunate to have the Senior Center, At Home In Darien and the Department of Human Services with whom to collaborate.

HOW DID YOU CONNECT WITH EACH OTHER?

In early June 2019, we met with a Sustainable CT Equity Coach and the Department of Human Services and made meaningful progress understanding the intent of the Equity Toolkit.

Transportation was identified by Human Services as one of the pressing needs for Seniors who do not drive. Access to events and services is limited without a car. As we considered our Sustainability events, the Farmer’s Market is not accessible to seniors without a car or with limited mobility. After discussion with Human Services and our Equity Coach, our approach was to engage with the organizations which serve this segment of the town’s population; Human Services, the Darien Senior Center and At Home In Darien. These organizations know our senior population well and engage with them every day to understand and address their needs. Their over-riding goal is to keep our seniors as engaged members of the community, able to enjoy living in Darien, rather than have them move away.

WHAT EMERGED FROM YOUR DIALOGUE?

During the month of June, we visited with the leaders of those organizations knowing that some seniors were missing out on some sustainability events, specifically the Farmers’ Market.

It emerged from our conversations that there was a slight disconnect among the Darien Human Services Department, the Darien Senior Center and At Home In Darien, which work very hard to coordinate themselves, having a weekly meeting toward that end.

The Human Services Department was working on becoming a certified Local Coordinating Agency for the Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP). SFMNP provides vouchers for locally grown fruits, vegetables, herbs and honey to eligible low-income seniors. Certification was approved and announce in August.

The leaders of the Senior Center recognized that the Farmers’ Market was something special because farmers’ markets can provide healthy and locally grown options to our seniors, something

that is important to maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Indeed, the Senior Center put information about the market in its monthly newsletters. The June issue was highly explanatory, and the subsequent issues through November were to present the basic info about where and when.

However, for seniors who do not drive or have limited mobility options, there was no mention of the transportation options offered by At Home In Darien.

On the other hand, At Home In Darien, did not present the market in its monthly news blast, but did clearly present its options for helping seniors who need support in the form of transportation to local events and services: free rides and discounted taxi vouchers.

In early July, we began to implement steps to close the identified gaps.

WHAT WAS THE RESULT OF YOUR COLLABORATION?

The Sustainability Team saw the chance to bring together the opportunity to go to the market with information about how to get there.

Here is what is now changing:

1. The Senior Center, which has been excellent at presenting information about the Farmers' Market to seniors, will add for the September- November issues (August was combined with July and had already been released) that transport to and from the market is available from At Home In Darien.
2. At Home In Darien, which provides wonderful transportation options to our seniors and also makes them aware of local resources that could be beneficial to them, will start with the August news blast to provide the same information about the Farmers Market that the Senior Center does in its monthly publication, with an offer to drive Darien seniors in need of a ride.
3. The Human Services Department will add to their display of services available for those whom they serve a flyer on the Framers' Market. It refers seniors in need of transportation to the market to At Home In Darien. That flyer has been prepared for them by the Sustainability Team. (see attached flyer)

HOW WILL YOU REFINE, REVISIT, AND IMPROVE?

The Sustainability Team learned from applying the Equity Toolkit that groups identified may not be getting all the information they need about sustainability events from the key sources they rely upon.

In the case of seniors and the Farmer's Market, it was a simple fix.

Going forward, as sustainability events arise, we can follow the same path to help ensure access.

For example, we may survey seniors (or ask our partner senior services resources to do this) about their awareness of other services available to them, especially sustainability events.

Equally, we may have more consultations with Darien Human Services Department, the Darien Senior Center and At Home In Darien to determine if seniors want more information about sustainability events, and possibly use their newsletters and news blasts to pose that question directly to their readership. We may also work with those resources to try additional approaches to surveying their needs, like a questionnaire in the Senior Center lobby.

Finally, we will inquire with At Home In Darien to track how many seniors availed themselves of the opportunity to use free transportation to the Farmer's Market.