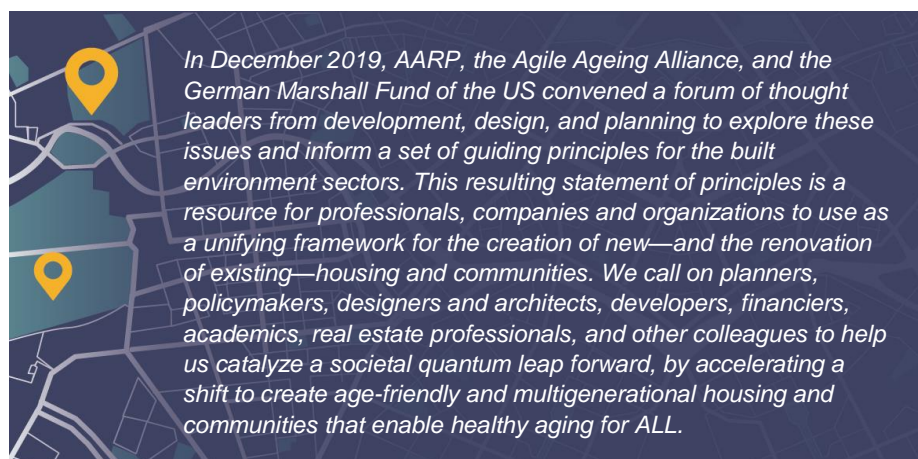# Creating Enabling & Equitable Housing and Multigenerational Communities

A Statement of Built Environment Principles

Societies across the globe are in the midst of long-term growth in the older adult population; by 2050, one in four people will be age 60 or older. Yet our homes and communities do not even meet current lifespan needs, as they were mostly designed for young, typically-abled people. Senior living options can address some of these issues but are often financially out of reach, and most older adults do not want to move to age-segregated communities. Indeed, mixed generations are increasingly living together, as illustrated by the growing trend in multigenerational households.

Many of our communities were built around the automobile, which limits a sense of community, negatively impacts safety and individual health, and increases healthcare demands and costs. Over the past few decades, the public health sector has increasingly shown that the built environment is a significant variable in obesity, chronic disease, and other public health concerns—particularly in low-income and minority communities. The COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated in both the US and UK, disparities in health outcomes, overburdened formal health care infrastructures, failing long-term care models, and housing models that fail to facilitate at-home care, services and supports. This is exacerbated by unequal access to broadband and technologies that can enable telehealth, remote learning and work, and social interaction, and by a lack of standardization that inhibits interoperability.

We aim to flip this equation and spark a movement whereby the built environment, at every scale, is a tool for disease prevention and the promotion of wellness. As architect and urban designer Jan Gehl says: "First *life*, then *spaces*, then *buildings*. The other way around never works." We have the responsibility to support life through the creation of spaces that support everyone at every stage across increasingly long lifespans. As we begin to build and renovate our homes and communities in a post-COVID-19 world, we must radically accelerate the application of an age-friendly framework that addresses disparities. This means housing and communities that are safe and affordable; facilitate multigenerational interaction; meet sensory, emotional, physical, social, behavioral, and health needs across the lifespan; and include appropriate transportation options and services—enabling every resident to thrive.

In December 2019, AARP, the Agile Ageing Alliance, and the German Marshall Fund of the US convened a forum of thought leaders from development, design, and planning to explore these issues and inform a set of guiding principles for the built environment sectors. This resulting statement of principles is a resource for professionals, companies and organizations to use as a unifying framework for the creation of new—and the renovation of existing—housing and communities. We call on planners, policymakers, designers and architects, developers, financiers, academics, real estate professionals, and other colleagues to help us catalyze a societal quantum leap forward, by accelerating a shift to create age-friendly and multigenerational housing and communities that enable healthy aging for ALL.

Convening Participants

London Convening Participants – December 2019

Anne Marie Brady, Program Officer, GMF Cities, German Marshall Fund of the US

Angela Brooks, Development Manager, Chicago Housing Authority

Tama Duffy Day, Principal and Health & Wellness Leader, Gensler design

Andrew Edkins, Director, Bartlett Real Estate Institute, University College London

Stacey Epperson, President & Founder, Next Step

Stephanie Firestone, Senior Strategic Policy Advisor, International Affairs, AARP

John Godfrey, Corporate Affairs Director, Legal & General

Brooke Greenhouse, Vice President, Cayuga Country Homes

Esther Greenhouse, Built Environment Strategist

Victoria Hills, Chief Executive, Royal Town Planning Institute

Sam Mauger, Chief Executive, Third Age Trust

Jeremy Myerson, Helen Hamlyn Chair of Design, Royal College of Art

Manisha Patel, Senior Partner, PRP architects

Paul Quinn, Director of Regeneration, Clarion Housing Group

Xaviere Roudeix-Crouan, Senior Research Analyst, Grosvenor Britain and Ireland

Henry Smith, Senior Program Manager, Centre for Ageing Better

Ian Spero, Founder, Agile Ageing Alliance

William Thomas, Founder, Minka Homes and Communities

Miguel Vazquez, Healthy Communities Planner, Riverside University Health System

CHALLENGE	PRINCIPLE
The Status Quo is "Dis-Abling" Our housing and infrastructure negatively impact people's level of functioning when not designed with respect to the true range of physical and cognitive abilities. If the environment is overly demanding, people struggle. If under-demanding, people do not have the opportunity to function within their abilities, which then atrophy.	**Enable by Design** Regulations and practice should fully consider citizens' needs, abilities and behaviors. We shall create housing and communities designed to fit people's varying functional levels, providing an optimal balance between effort and support so people can function well within their abilities at every age.
Limited Options and Demand Housing design and policy solutions are rarely informed by real needs. Housing has been built the same way for so long that people can only envision a narrow range of products. Consumers rarely know what to ask for and thus demand too little.	**Drive Informed Demand** Individuals and families have a right to expect living environments that are safe and enabling across the lifespan. We must demonstrate innovations that advance this goal and become the norm and not the exception.
Disparities in Many Forms Lack of investment in a supportive built environment, particularly in low-income and minority communities, often unnecessarily disadvantages residents and communities—physically, behaviorally and economically. Consequently, vulnerable communities disproportionately struggle to attain basic health, safety, and wellbeing.	**Alleviate Disparities** We shall prioritize the creation and maintenance of enabling built environments in disproportionately impacted communities, as a vehicle for properly addressing the needs of disadvantaged residents and alleviating disparities.
Limited Financial Models Limit What's Possible Financial products are restrictive, for example by not fully accounting for people's assets, such as incomes of multiple people living in a dwelling, or for hidden costs and impacts, such as the future value of modified assets.	**Create Appropriate Finance Products** We shall pursue the expansion of existing, and the development of new, financial models and products to facilitate investment in housing stock and communities that enable independence over the lifespan and view lifelong, multigenerational living environments as an asset.
Limited Access to Technology Technology limitations include broadband in rural areas, technology among the poor, and digital literacy among older adults. These limitations in turn restrict access to health care, opportunity, and remote engagement.	**Prioritize Connectivity** We must prioritize the provision of broadband access and appropriate technologies that enable telehealth and remote learning, work, and engagement, as a means to facilitate greater independence and participation by residents of all ages and abilities in all aspects of society.
Age Bias A lack of opportunities for people to regularly interact with people in other generations, i.e., intergenerational interaction, perpetuates the generational discord and ageism that are endemic to society.	**Facilitate Intergenerational Engagement** We shall create living environments that facilitate engagement across all generations, for their mutual benefit and the continued contribution to society by people of all ages. This familiarity will also serve to combat ageist stereotypes.
Siloed Planning Work Results in Limited Outcomes Planning for housing and communities that does not engage professionals across all relevant disciplines, misses key opportunities to advance important societal agendas.	**Lead Cross-Sector Collaboration** We must use municipal planning and zoning policies and tools to create public strategies that promote health for all, sustainability, and social cohesion, and advance developments that demonstrate an active contribution to these agendas.
Limited Focus on Major Issues Global as well as local priorities such as climate resilience, healthcare, and other efforts to advance UN Sustainable Development Goals, fail to fully consider and address the major demographic change of population aging, often treating these as disparate concerns.	**Infuse Age-Friendliness in Other Priorities** We shall tap existing efforts to advance UN Sustainable Development Goals, as opportunities in a post-COVID-19 world to regenerate and retrofit our built environment assets using a lifelong lens.