



**Montclair Senior Citizens Advisory Council  
Senior Survey Results**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

**Background**

The Montclair Senior Citizens Advisory Committee (SCAC), in conjunction with the Partners for Health Foundation, developed a survey to collect data from Montclair residents over age 55. The survey aimed to gather residents' perspectives about living in Montclair and their perceived ability to 'age in place'. Based on the 2010 US Census,<sup>1</sup> 9,092 adults age 55 and older live in Montclair Township. This survey provided an opportunity to give voice to Montclair residents over the age of 55. Inclusion of the population between 55 and 62 was selected by design so that township planners can reflect the priorities and concerns of upcoming seniors whose decisions to stay or move will evolve over the next 20 years. Survey results will continue to be analyzed by various groups in order to make informed decisions into the future.

The survey consisted of 46 multiple-choice items, checklists, or open-ended questions that covered the following areas: communication, housing and living arrangement, transportation, service needs, nutrition, voting, and advocacy. It was available to be completed in both paper and online<sup>2</sup> versions ([www.SCACsurveyMontclair.com](http://www.SCACsurveyMontclair.com)), and administered from June through August 2013. The Center for Research and Evaluation on Education and Human Services (CREEHS) at Montclair State University provided technical assistance on the development of the survey instrument and analyses of survey results.

**Response Rate**

Overall, 789 individuals responded to the survey.

- Respondents were primarily female (N=578, 73%), aged 65-74 (N=237, 30%), and had been living in Montclair for an average of 29.9 years (N=731).
  - Of the 789 total survey respondents, 39% were age 55 to 64 and the majority were women
- About half of the respondents were retired (N=410, 52%) and, of those who were not retired, more than one-third planned to do so in five years or less (N=140, of 363, 39%).
  - Less than one-quarter of adults age 55 to 64 (22%) were retired
- Most survey respondents (N= 526, 67%) identified themselves as White and others (N=113, 14%) as Black.

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<sup>1</sup> Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics: 2010 Demographic Profile Data

<sup>2</sup> via SurveyMonkey

- Nearly half of the respondents (N=361, 46%) reported annual household income levels of \$75,000 or more, which is higher than the statewide median of \$71,180<sup>3</sup>, as noted by US Census Data.
- Respondents most frequently (N=329, 42%) reported that they lived in a private home with others and about one-third of the respondents (N=258, 33%) specified that they live *alone* in a home or apartment.
- Further, it is important to point out that the majority of survey respondents (N= 596, 76%) indicated that they had voted in-person or by absentee ballot in the last local election.

## II. KEY FINDINGS

**Transportation—Respondents to the Senior Survey voiced concerns about pedestrian safety, public transportation and parking.** This survey revealed resident concerns about transportation across three main themes: (1) safety, (2) public transportation, and (3) parking. According to respondents, the major safety concerns for seniors in Montclair are speeding drivers and sidewalk conditions. One respondent commented, *“Speed limits and pedestrian crossing laws should [be] enforced. Many people drive too fast, and most do not stop for pedestrians at crosswalks.”* Further, nearly one-third of the respondents (N=236, 30%) rated walking in Montclair as *fair* or *poor*. Specifically, respondents commented that the sidewalks are hazardous, dangerous, and unsafe. Multiple respondents reported that they have fallen because of broken, uneven, or ice and snow-covered sidewalks.

Regarding public transportation, many respondents indicated that they do not use the Montclair Senior Bus, the public bus service, or NJ Transit. In the comments section, Montclair seniors requested more information about the Montclair Senior Bus Service such as schedules and routes. When prompted to provide suggestions, one respondent asked for, *“More bus and train information readily available and also schedules and information for Senior Bus Service.”* Some respondents also indicated that it is not necessary to have a bus service exclusively for seniors. One respondent suggested, *“There should be [a] shuttle bus that circulates all the time to all the town centers and main community buildings for all citizens...”* Further, another respondent commented, *“I am not sure what the senior bus does and who is eligible to ride it. Is it only people who have no other transportation or who are sick/frail? I'd love to see it operate like a real bus service and make scheduled runs to stores, train station, center of Montclair, etc. I can drive but parking is a nightmare and as I age, I am concerned about how I will get around when I can't drive. I do not want to be stuck in my home when so many great resources are so nearby. I also would prefer to retain some independence, something that is crucial for me because my children live out of state. I have used taxis but they are expensive and waiting for pick up is often a problem.”*

Parking in Montclair was an area of concern for senior respondents as well. The majority of respondents rated parking in Montclair as *fair* (N=313, 40%) or *poor* (N=213, 27%). Further, respondents complained

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<sup>3</sup> <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/34000.html>

that the parking in Montclair is inaccessible and impractical. Seniors remarked that they need parking options that are less expensive and closer to stores, especially for those who may have trouble walking long distances. Regarding specific recommendations for improving transportation in Montclair, one respondent indicated, *“Overnight parking! Haven't you seen disabled seniors on Claremont Avenue walking 3 plus blocks to get to their vehicles? How accommodating is that????”*

### **Housing — Respondents to the Senior Survey (regardless of age, retirement status, or income) had concerns about being able to continue living in Montclair after retirement.**

Nearly half of the respondents (N=347, 44%) indicated that they have considered moving to another town in recent years. Specifically, in open-ended comments, survey respondents voiced concerns about high property taxes, their ability to perform home maintenance tasks, and the limited smaller housing options in Montclair. One respondent indicated, *“The high town taxes make it very difficult to continue living in Montclair. It's a wonderful town, but the taxes continue to rise and to eat into a limited income.”* Another worried, *“Tax relief is available only for seniors who have impossibly low incomes. As I approach retirement, that concerns me. I won't be living in poverty, but my income will be greatly reduced. Will I be able to afford my house?”*

Another theme that emerged from the survey data was the desire to downsize to a smaller residence, as was indicated by more than one-third of the respondents (N=291, 37%). Those who wished to downsize had little preference for whether this smaller residence was located within Montclair or in another town. One respondent commented, *“Our home is too big for me and my husband and there are limited smaller housing options [in Montclair].”* On the basis of anecdotal information gleaned over time and the open-ended survey commentary about downsizing, the SCAC recommends the following guidelines for housing to meet needs of these residents: 1) living on one floor with easy access to outdoor spaces 2) having elevators if in multistory buildings, and 3) having floor plans which include adequate space for caregivers or visiting relatives to stay over. Of the 291 respondents who planned to downsize, the large majority (N=216, 74%) are considering moving to another town to do so. That is, 74% of respondents, many of whom acknowledged spending many happy years in Montclair, are not committed to living here in their retirement. Only one-quarter of the respondents (N=75, 26%) were set on remaining in town.

### **Municipal Services—The results of the Senior Survey indicated a need for a liaison at the town level who is responsible for organizing and sharing information about services and activities for seniors.**

In the past, Montclair supported a Department of the Aging, which was responsible for coordination at the Township level, dissemination of information and community support. Respondents suggested that the town have more activities for seniors. One survey respondent commented that, *“I think it is sad that high taxes and lack of activities prompt seniors to leave Montclair. If you don't drive, it is very difficult to get to activities, shopping, doctor appointments. And except for movies that cost a lot, there isn't much for seniors to do. There needs to be more for seniors if Montclair expects people to remain in the township after their kids are grown. And there needs to be a property tax break for seniors.”* Another remarked, *“It would be really beneficial for Montclair to have a Senior Center where activities and services can be made available to seniors of Montclair. It is*

*a travesty that this community does not have a senior program/center.”* In addition to more activities for seniors, respondents also indicated the need for information about supportive services like Prescription Discount Programs; New Jersey Statewide Heating Assistance and Referral for Energy Services (NEW JERSEY SHARES); improved transportation opportunities including the Montclair senior bus; federal programs such as social security, Medicare, and Medicaid; along with assistance with the completion of forms.

### III. NEXT STEPS

The senior survey illuminated many needs expressed by older residents of Montclair. Additionally, over time the survey data will be revisited in order to answer other questions of importance to future planning that were not covered in this summary report. While it may be unreasonable to expect that the next Master Plan address all of these concerns immediately, the Montclair Senior Citizens Advisory Committee offers the following recommendations as a starting point:

#### Transportation

1. Encourage the Pedestrian Safety Council to consider the needs of seniors in their plans, especially regarding sidewalk remediation and walking safety.
2. Post bus schedules at frequented venues, such as stores and banks. Respondents also desired more routes and stops; increased service on weekends; and more transportation options around main shopping areas.
3. Leverage opportunities to improve Montclair’s green energy efforts by providing older adults with more options for affordable, transportation, options i.e. jitneys, bicycles, shared taxis, etc.:
  - o Rename the “Senior Bus” and increase advertising for it. Many survey respondents were unaware of this service and others noted that seniors might be turned off by the name.
  - o Consider a town-wide circulator bus.

#### Housing

1. Include the needs of seniors in plans for new housing in the future, considering long-term housing options for those on a fixed income. Such housing would be smaller, require little/no maintenance, have an elevator, be within walking distance to shopping areas, have floor plans that follow universal design standards (i.e. housing designed to be useable by most people **over their lifetime** without the need for major adaptation or specialized design) and be suitable for independent living. Senior organizations in town, such as the Montclair Senior Citizens Advisory Council, could be invited to preliminary conversations with potential housing developers.
2. Consider tax abatement for seniors. It is evident from the write-in responses that taxes are a predominate concern of Montclair residents who are or will soon be retired.
3. Explore creative zoning ordinances (i.e. tax abatements) to encourage older adults who live alone in private homes to share their domicile with another older adult or adults (i.e. construct a *nanny-pod* or retrofit a separate apartment within an established home).

4. Embrace and acknowledge age diversity in conversations about the general diversity of the town. Montclair has a reputation for being a town with a racially-diverse population. Age diversity may also be considered part of Montclair's identity.

### **Municipal Services**

1. Consider reinstituting the Department of Aging. This office was a social service agency that acted as clearinghouse for all things related to seniors, e.g. Medicare, prescription drugs, regulatory forms. The staff produced the monthly Montclair Office of Aging (MOA) Newsletter to keep every senior in town apprised of timely issues including opportunities for social interaction. The Department was a conduit of information from many networks including the Essex County Department of Aging.
2. Create a position for a Liaison of Senior Affairs. The results of the survey suggest that seniors are not sufficiently informed about municipal services that are geared toward their population. In addition to acting as the Montclair information clearinghouse (e.g. maintaining a public calendar, disseminating information via traditional and social media outlets, coordination between existing community cultural centers), the Liaison will also work closely with the Montclair SCAC to represent the interests of older adults on planning committees, on public and private projects and with County, Township and Community administrations engaged in decision-making that will impact the lives of seniors. Consider supporting a senior center or senior space. Survey respondents have voiced a need for centralized activities for seniors that would help encourage retired adults to remain in town. Montclair organizations such as Friends of Edgemont Park, the YMCA, and the Montclair Public Library have expressed interest in housing such a center. Any center that is provided must be designed for handicap access.

In all, 789 individuals completed the survey. Of these, 759 respondents reported their age as 55 or older, which is 8% of the Montclair township population as reported by the Census (N=759 out of 9,092 adults). Considering that survey administration occurred over three summer months (June – August 2013), this may be considered a sizeable proportion of residents. Further, it is important to point out that the majority of survey respondents indicated that they are voters. Three-quarters or more of respondents indicated that they had voted in-person or by absentee ballot in the last local (N=596, 76%), State (N=628, 80%), and federal elections (N=661, 84%). For these reasons, it should be of interest to public officials to consider these survey results in planning township services and infrastructure that meet the needs of Montclair's senior residents.

## **IV. APPENDIX - ANNOTATED SURVEY OF RESULTS**