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A Great Place for All People to Grow Old? The Longevity Project Announces a Strategic Planning Initiative Focused on Longevity for All!

It has been 10 years since **the Longevity Project for a greater Richmond** (formerly known as the Greater Richmond Age Wave Coalition) crafted and adopted our region's first strategic plan focused on making our region a great place for all people to grow old. The last update to that plan occurred in 2015.

In the intervening years, evidence about longevity and our understanding about aging has evolved. Vision, language and focus are shifting to include the lifespan of the whole person, recognizing that we are all part of our aging population. Vision language and focus are shifting to include an intentional equity lens that recognizes that all in our region do not enjoy longevity due to historical and current inequities. The Greater Richmond Age Wave Coalition's name has changed to **the Longevity Project for a greater Richmond** to reflect this evolving understanding, language, vision and focus. The Longevity Project for a greater Richmond continues to be led by the two managing partners in this long-term work:

- Dr. Thelma Watson, Senior Connections, The Capital Area Agency on Aging, and
- Dr. E. Ayn Welleford, Virginia Commonwealth University's Department of Gerontology

The shifts in narratives and expanding vision and focus mean that there is a need for a regional strategic plan update. Now is the time to refresh our regional vision of aging. Now is the time to refresh narratives based on updated, evidence-based and community-identified needs. This strategic planning project will establish regional goals inclusive of the total aging lifespan and will ensure an equity focus. The project will collaboratively engage government agencies, service providers, nonprofit organizations, businesses and community members in Richmond, Powhatan, Ashland, Hanover, Henrico, Chesterfield, Goochland and New Kent. Opportunities will be created for involvement of a diversity of voices for creation of an inclusive, comprehensive three-year strategic plan.

Consultants have been engaged to lead this important strategic update. Delores Kimbrough from Kimbrough Consulting and Susan Wilkes from Wilkes Consulting, LLC will help to guide our steps. A steering committee was formed in July 2020 that supports, guides and directs all planning activities. The steering committee members include:

- Michelle Johnson, Charles City County Administration
- Carol Young, Henrico Department of Social Services

- Tracey Gendron, Virginia Commonwealth University, Department of Gerontology
- Martha Heeter, PlanRVA
- Reginald Gordon, Human Services, City of Richmond
- Judy Nelson, community member of Elder Voices
- Thelma Watson, Senior Connections, The Capital Area Agency on Aging
- E. Ayn Welleford, Virginia Commonwealth University, Department of Gerontology

This is an exciting and critically important project for our region. Over the past 10 years, we have worked passionately to disrupt ageism and address issues that affect older adults. This strategic plan update will build on that good work. Together, we can identify strategies that support our demand for longevity equity, that recognize that we are all part of the aging population, and that advance the ending of ageism.

“Our future looks bright. Together we will make our communities a great place for all people to grow old.” (Dr. E. Ayn Welleford)

“The residents of greater Richmond are the center of the vision for the Longevity Project. We will enjoy a greater quality of life with increased opportunities for longevity.” (Dr. Thelma Watson)