

**Viva the Vital**  
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## **The Future for Boomers is in Swampscott and Agritopia**

*By Kiersten Ware*

In a small bedroom community of less than 15,000 people north of Boston we see what could be the future for older Boomers. The town of Swampscott was planning a new high school at the same time the existing century-old building that housed the local senior center was reaching the end of its useful life. A bright citizen suggested they modify the design of the high school so it could also accommodate a 6,500-square-foot senior center.

Two years ago the high school and senior center opened and life in the town has not been the same since.

The inevitable doubling of the over-65 population across the country in the next twenty years will bring problems and opportunities to communities everywhere. Boomers, that demographic bulge begun in the 1940's, will continue to change society and culture every step of the way. Nowhere will that impact be clearer than on what we now call "senior living."

Boomers tell us in survey after survey that they don't ever want to live in assisted living or nursing homes. They'd much prefer to "age in place" and stay home, even with a debilitating illness. With an enormous caregiver supply problem looming, and the lack of existing beds for twice as many "seniors" in the future, communities, regions and states are trying to find new answers to where and how Boomers will live in the future.

The Swampscott solution is one approach we expect will be emulated around the country. Leveraging existing infrastructure to address the needs of teenagers and older citizens at the same time is more than smart, it is practical. One benefit beyond the financial is the opportunity for the different generations to intermingle and interact. Already Swampscott High School students are volunteering to help at the Senior Center, to earn community service hours. And the seniors themselves have volunteered to provide manpower for the high school library, enabling it to stay open longer.

At the other end of the country, near Phoenix, Arizona, a new multi-generational development also looks like a precursor of life for Boomers in the future. Joe Johnson took his family's 400-acre farm and set up land parcels with careful thought of which land uses should have proximity to one another, and how each connects the planned community together. The center piece is an assisted living building, next to the community center and pool.

Johnson planned the street layouts and neighborhoods to foster community and social interaction, and then went further by getting the zoning rights for a second dwelling unit — an 800-square-foot bungalow on most home lots — with the intent that a family could share their lot with an older parent or other family member living separately and independently. Both the bungalows and assisted living facility are a major selling point to today's adult children who know that at some future date they are going to need to provide care to an older parent or relative.

Johnson completed his vision by including community farm land, so the 450-dwelling community could benefit from local produce. It's no wonder he named his new community "Agritopia," as it combined all the things he believed were needed for the community of the future – multi-generations living together, healthcare facilities and locally grown food.

These are but two examples of the new approaches to "senior" living that we expect will be developed in the coming years by older Boomers. At every phase of life, Boomers have looked at how the previous generations did things and decided there had to be a better way. Facing a longer life, with 15, 20 or even 30 "extra" years, Boomers are looking for new ways to stay active, vibrant and engaged in their communities. The days of sequestered "senior" communities like Sun City are nearing an end. Multi-generational solutions like the Swampscott Senior Center and Agritopia will pop up across the country.

Soon there may be more examples with a Virginia address. On May 20<sup>th</sup> business and community leaders, city and county administrators, universities and government officials from all across the Commonwealth will gather for the first annual Virginia Age Wave Planning Forum (info at [olderdominion.org](http://olderdominion.org)). Their goal is to educate and inspire local leaders to help their communities plan for the age wave, and to make our local communities more livable for people of all ages, including older Boomers.

Perhaps it is appropriate to kick off this planning forum in Charlottesville, Virginia, where local resident Thomas Jefferson summed up the role of intergenerational living when he said, "The web of mutual obligations between generations is essential for a civilized society."

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