

# **Why was Alton chosen as one of AARP's best places to live for under \$40,000 a year?**

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer  
August 6 2018 2:33 PM



**ALTON** – Alton has been named in the American Association for Retired Person's (AARP) top 10 places to live for under \$40,000 in 2018.

Alton Mayor Brant Walker said the designation was the result of a two-year process done with a joint venture between the city and Senior Services Plus (SSP). Alton

Housing and Zoning Deputy Director Deanna Barnes was the city's chief representative to the committee, which worked with the AARP and demographic expert Bert Sperling, founder and CEO of BestPlaces, to ensure Alton matched AARP's expectations of economic health, housing affordability, crime rates, recreation and leisure amenities.

“This is absolutely fantastic for Alton,” Walker said. “It is getting us a lot of national attention. We've always known Alton is a great place to live and raise a family, and the rest of the Riverbend has been waking up to that, too. Now the whole country is starting to realize Alton is a great place to live.”

SSP Executive Director John Becker said Walker's administration has been in place during a lot of great growth in Alton, including the multi-modal transportation station. He said Alton already had many of the amenities and activities in place suitable for the AARP's conditions for being an Age-Friendly Community.

“Every organization has a group they represent, and we represent seniors,” he said. “The city of Alton worked with us to get this designation from the AARP, and we were already doing a lot of the stuff needed to make the list. There are a few places in Illinois up north with the designation, but Alton is maybe one of five in the entire state.”

Becker credited organizations like his own for this diagnosis but was quick to emphasize the community effort of this designation. He said groups such as Centerstone, which is working with the Madison County Sheriff's Office and Alton Police Department to tackle the opioid crisis, were also contributing to that designation. Due to pain pill prescriptions, many in the aging demographic are being ravaged by the opioid epidemic as well.

That demographic is also growing in this country. Becker said, by 2030, one of every five Americans will be over 65 years old.

“People over 65 will be outnumbering children in the country, and that's crazy when it comes to growth,” he said. “Alton has been very proactive with that demographic.”

In a release from the AARP, Illinois AARP Associate State Director Julie Vahling said Alton has been extremely proactive in becoming a place for seniors.

“We called Alton 'a funky small town with big river life,' and that's absolutely the case,” she said in a release. “The city is committed to becoming even more age-friendly, the housing market remains affordable, and St. Louis is a \$3 train ride away. We're thrilled to have a place like Alton here in Illinois, and we hope other communities will strive for the same livability for people of all ages.”

Barnes also emphasized the housing market when talking about Alton's designation as an age-friendly community. In fact, Walker said real estate in Alton is starting to sell again, and people are taking out permits to better their properties at higher rates than previous years. With all the national attention coming to the city from *The Small Business Revolution* as well as other initiatives, Walker said he is hopeful the city may see its first population growth in years.