



Le Tour de Ham riders get rolling on Tuesday evenings.

## A RIDE FOR EVERYONE

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

Residents Stan Palla  
and Veronique Vanblaere

Described by its organizers as a “social bicycle ride for the sheer fun of it,” **Le Tour de Ham** is a cycling outing for people of all ages. “All bicycles and abilities welcome. No spandex required.”

A relatively slow biking group that travels at speeds of 10 to 12 mph at most, the biweekly bicycle ride does a 10-mile, largely flat loop around Birmingham and promises not to leave any rider behind. Tuesdays the cyclists gather at 6 p.m. and wheels are rolling by 6:15. Saturday mornings’ slower, beginner-paced ride meets at 10 a.m. and sets off at 10:30.

As an “unsanctioned and unsupported event,” states the tour’s Meetup page, participants ride at their own risk and are expected to come equipped with water, a spare tire tube, lights and a safely functional bike. The ride ends with food, drinks and fun at a local eatery, often with discounts for the Tour de Hammers.

This widely known and celebrated event was created in 2012 by friends Stan Palla and Veronique Vanblaere. Palla imagined the ride as a way to bring people together, especially bicyclists and artists. He didn’t expect that families, retirees and all sorts of locals and

even tourists would join the fun.

“At first three people, four people would show up. Six at the most,” Vanblaere told a reporter. “And then one day we were at 150.” As Le Tour de Ham’s Facebook page declares, “Invite your friends.”

*Birmingham is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities* ■

## ASK, LISTEN, TALK, DO

FRANKLIN, NEW HAMPSHIRE

City of Franklin and the  
University of New Hampshire

Like many communities in rural New England, the riverfront City of Franklin, once a thriving mill town, has been experiencing the challenges of a struggling downtown, an aging population and, for almost one-quarter of its residents, poverty.

In the spring of 2015, the city’s leaders, in partnership with the state university and others, hosted a three-day workshop called **Franklin for a Lifetime**. In welcoming the attendees—a mix of Franklin residents and invited experts—Mayor Ken Merrifield said, “In this workshop, we will think about ‘What could Franklin do to attract businesses, workers and their families?’

as well as ‘What could Franklin consider in order to support its citizens who wish to stay with us as they grow older?’”

As preparation for the workshop, a steering committee engaged 119 community members (among Franklin’s nearly 8,500 residents) through storytelling groups, a children’s art-work project, one-on-one interviews and focus groups. Residents praised Franklin for being a community where people help one another. The challenges focused on the downtown’s limited selection of stores and eateries, a lack of transportation options, inadequate housing and a need for more communication about local activities and issues.

The workshop resulted in five key action areas for Franklin: marketing, community events, housing, civic life, and arts and culture.

At the one-year anniversary of the workshop, a gathering was held to celebrate the achievements to date, including renovating the abandoned Riverbend Mill compound into affordable housing.

In its article about the community’s progress, the Citizens’ Institute on Rural Design, which helped lead the workshop, declared: “By creating vibrant public green spaces, diversifying amenities and businesses downtown, and expanding housing options, particularly for the older residents, Franklin is effectively planning for an aging population, while increasing livability and sense of place for all residents.” ■

## ASKING TAXPAYERS HOW TO SPEND THEIR MONEY

SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA

Mayor Sam Liccardo and  
Council Member Raul Perez

Municipal budgeting—*yawn*, right? Not in San Jose, California, where residents of the city’s District 3 have embraced a collaborative version that puts the typically top-down process into the hands of citizens.

“It seems like budgeting and spending is usually done in a black box that we don’t have eyes on,” says San Jose neighborhood leader and

AARP member Bert Weaver. “But with this kind of participatory budgeting, we really got a close view of what we would spend on.”

The process kicked off in 2015 with the allocation of \$100,000 by San Jose Mayor Sam Liccardo and Council Member Raul Perez to a pilot project called **D3 Decides**. It ended in May 2016 with the city’s commitment to pay for eight projects that voters selected, including upgrading lighting on pedestrian paths (\$36,000), paying artists to transform utility boxes into works of art (\$19,250) and installing soccer nets in parks (\$600).

Over six months, residents engaged directly in a democratic practice that is credited as beginning almost 30 years ago in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre, where as many as 50,000 people a year have shaped as much as 21 percent of the city’s budget. Today, participatory budgeting has spread to more than 1,500 cities worldwide. The process typically works like this:

Step 1: Brainstorm ideas through civic meetings and online tools.

Step 2: Take those ideas and develop them into feasible proposals.

Step 3: Vote!

In San Jose, residents generated more than 150 ideas in 2015, ranging from tree pruning to installing tether-ball stations. Then, a group of 18 budget delegates, including Weaver, researched those ideas and narrowed them down to a list of 27 that could be implemented on city property with public funds. All District 3 residents over the age of 15 were given an opportunity to vote, either online or in person at various locations. In the end, more than 500 residents had their voices heard.

San Jose’s venture into participatory budgeting “demonstrates how embracing ideas that come directly from our neighborhood advocates can help us improve our city with modest public funds,” said Mayor Liccardo.

In fact, the process went so well that District 3 residents were later asked another question: “How would you spend \$250,000?” The answers ranged from self-cleaning park toilets to solar-powered cell-phone charging stations.

*San Jose is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities* ■