

AFFORDABLE HOUSING: A RIGHT WE ALL SHARE

STRIDES MADE IN TACKLING HOMELESSNESS, BUT MORE WORK NEEDED, WRITES DONNA DANIELLI



DONNA DANIELLI
Column

Metroland's Halton newspapers reached out to members of their Halton Advisory Council to share their views on local issues in conjunction with the federal election. Here's the first part of a three-part se-

ries.

As a society, we all acknowledge that everyone has a right to safe, decent, permanent and affordable housing.

Yet, in Halton, recent data shows a wait list of 3,241 for subsidized or rent-geared-to-income housing. The Region of Halton has made great strides in addressing homelessness, but the reality is that a wait list of that high a number can take years to fulfil.

Lack of affordable housing has become a key driver of core housing, as we see the demand for affordable housing continue to grow while the cost of housing and income inequality expand.

In our increasing numbers of working poor households, we see crowded conditions and residents working multiple jobs to cover expenses. Peo-

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ple who experience homelessness and housing insecurity are more likely to suffer from physical and mental illness, poverty, discrimination and violence.

We know that households led by women are disproportionately represented here, and also that Indigenous people, people with disabilities, immigrants and refugees, youth and older adults and members of racialized communities face high levels of housing insecurity.

One of the first things we need to do is redefine what affordable housing actually is. The current

outdated formula considers affordable housing to be rentals in which the tenant pays no more than 30 per cent of their pre-tax income on housing.

A healthy housing vacancy rate for a municipality is considered to be 3 per cent, yet Halton has been significantly lower than that for more than a decade. Low vacancy rates means landlords are able to ask for and receive higher monthly rents.

Many people working minimum wage jobs or receiving Ontario Works or Ontario Disability Support Program income simply cannot afford the high

rents we are seeing across Halton.

There is a great deal of work being done to ensure that new development in Halton includes a portion of affordable housing, but that definition of what is or is not considered affordable housing has to change to truly have an impact.

There is also a housing supply crisis right now. We need to see more emphasis put on purpose-built rental housing. That requires co-operation and commitment from all levels of government. There needs to be investments in nonmarket solutions, such as co-operative and rent-geared-to-income housing, as well as funding support for new construction of affordable rental housing.

This needs to be accompanied by low-cost public funding for the maintenance and repair of existing social housing stock.

Affordable housing is not a handout; it is a necessity. Housing is much more

than a roof over your head. It is a determiner of one's quality of life — it leads to better mental and physical health, financial stability and security.

Quality affordable housing has the ability to transform communities while it provides hope and a better life to those in need.

Investments in the creation of more affordable housing units, repurposing existing properties to meet social housing needs and purpose-built rental housing, along with an updated formula to determine what affordable housing actually means, are the tools all levels of government must implement if we are ever going to be able to provide all individuals and families with access to stable, quality affordable housing.

Donna Danielli is the executive director of Milton Transitional Housing. She can be reached at donna.danielli@mthmilton.ca.

SHARPEN YOUR PENCILS!

It's back-to-school time

Safety tips for kids commuting to school

Are you worried about your children commuting to school on their own? Here are some instructions you can give them to make sure they stay safe.

- ▶ **If your children take the bus**
 - Leave early and don't run to the bus stop.
 - Stay on the sidewalk until the bus comes to a complete stop.
 - Use the ramp to climb aboard the bus if there is one and sit down quickly.
 - Keep your backpack on your knees or stow it under your seat.
 - Wait for the bus to completely stop moving before getting up.
 - Don't push when exiting the bus.
- ▶ **If your children walk to school**
 - Always use the sidewalk and make sure to respect traffic lights, even if there aren't any cars coming.
 - Only cross at intersections and look left and right before crossing.
- If there's a crossing guard, follow their directives.
- ▶ **If your children bike to school**
 - Always wear a helmet and make sure it's securely fastened.
 - Make certain nothing gets stuck in the bike's chain or wheel such as backpack straps or an umbrella.
 - Use bike lanes whenever possible.
 - Don't go too fast, even if you're in a hurry.

In addition to providing your kids with these safety tips, it's a good idea to accompany them to school a few times before they make the trip on their own.

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