

# Halton's housing to become more affordable for low-income singles

By IRENE GENTLE

The Champion

Low-income singles who find it tough to meet steep Halton rents will be the target market for up to 84 rent supplement units allocated by the Province earlier this year.

Regional council agreed recently to focus on singles after learning they're the most under-served population in Halton when it comes to affordable housing.

"They tend to be a group that isn't thought about in terms of needs," said Gwen Maloney, director of the Halton Non-Profit Housing Corporation Division.

"They're coming to us for one-bedroom apartments and we

don't have any."

When most social housing units were being constructed, single people weren't fingered as a priority, explained Ms Maloney.

By the time their need became obvious, rental units in general had ceased to be profitable.

New units stopped being built, leading to the current region-wide shortage of rental housing.

Today, Halton's vacancy rate is less than 1 per cent.

But it doesn't pay for builders to dip back into the rental market with land and construction costs as high as they are, said Ms Maloney.

"The private sector has told us they don't make money building rental housing," she said. "They're better off to build condos or other types of ownership housing."

## Correct earlier imbalances

So when the Province announced it would help fund 84 rent supplement units in Halton, Ms Maloney saw it as an opportunity to correct some of the earlier imbalances.

"Before we just accept 84 units, let's see if we can be strategic about this," she said.

"Even if it's a drop in the bucket in terms of overall need, we tried to analyze what the priorities are."

Council agreed to target singles in the take-up of the units, but stressed that opportunities to fill all 84 units shouldn't be wasted.

The next step is to encourage landlords to take the Province up on its offer.

To that end, the Region is poised to launch an information and advertising blitz geared to area landlords.

"We want to see these units taken up," said Ms Maloney.

She promised to report back to council with information on the unit take-up by the end of the year.

Under the rent supplement program, tenants pay a certain portion of their income toward rent.

The Province then chips in the rest, so that landlords receive rent at full market value.

# Passed-out driver saved from harm

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"I pulled my vehicle in front of hers. We matched speeds so we didn't smash," said Mr. McConnell.

When the two vehicles were literally bumper to bumper, he applied his brakes and gently brought the larger Lumina to a stop.

At the same time, an anonymous driver pulled his half-ton pick-up truck beside the Lumina to prevent it from drifting back into traffic.

Ms Westwater and her husband, Gord, are attempting to learn the identity of the second driver, who is believed to be local, in order to thank him as well.

"The more I think of the story, the less I can believe it," said Mr. Westwater. "They were both mature men. I thought it was a pretty neat thing."

Once the Lumina was stopped, Mr. McConnell squeezed in through a window to shut off the van and open the locked doors.

Both men deserve a police citation for their actions, said Mr. Westwater, who called The Champion in order to publicly acknowledge the pair.

He also called Mr. McConnell at work to personally thank him for his part. But Mr. McConnell shrugs his actions off as just being neighbourly.

"I've driven quite a bit and I've seen a lot of accidents," he said. "Every once in a while, you've got to do something good."

After the incident, Mr. McConnell stopped in at Milton District Hospital to check on the condition of the driver, who had remained unconscious even after the vehicle's flight ended.

Ms Westwater emerged from the mishap without an outward scratch. She was taken to the hospital for tests, but results weren't in as of press time.

Even the Lumina got off lightly. After fixing a tire rim, it was ready to be driven the next day.

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