

Housing shortage worse in Milton than other parts of Halton: Schau

By **STEPHANIE THIESSEN**
The Champion

With a lack of affordable housing in Milton for seniors and growing waiting lists for subsidized housing, Ward 4 Councillor Wendy Schau said something needs to be done — and soon.

"We're becoming like a mid- to high-income ghetto," said Ms Schau. "It's important that seniors who have lived here all their lives find a place to live."

That was the message she delivered to a few dozen people who attended an information meeting addressing affordable housing for seniors last week at the Milton Seniors' Activity Centre.

Ms Schau — who's also chair of the Milton Affordable Housing Coalition — said although she's been concerned about affordable housing for many years, she's been thinking about it even more lately as she and her husband contemplate downsizing.

"Now that I'm getting to be a senior, Bruce and I are thinking, 'What happens next?'"

Ms Schau went over the various affordable housing options for seniors in Milton, which include seniors' condominiums like those on Millside Drive and Drury Park, which are freehold condominiums; apartments, both rental and subsidized like the one on Bruce Street; and assisted living

facilities, such as Martindale Gardens on Martin Street.

She said the shortage of affordable housing is definitely a local issue.

"The situation is worse here than other parts of Halton," Ms Schau said, adding 'affordable' is defined as shelter that costs no more than 30 per cent of someone's gross income.

According to 2001 figures from Statistics Canada, 25 per cent of Halton residents under the age of 25 who are renting are spending 50 per cent or more of their income on shelter.

As residents get older, the statistic drops and then increases once again for seniors. More than 25 per cent of seniors over the age of 75 renting in Halton spend 50 per cent or more of their income on shelter.

"Seniors and affordable housing is where the biggest difficulty lies," she said, adding there aren't enough subsidized apartment buildings in town.

There are currently 55 seniors on the waiting list for a subsidized apartment, she said. There are just 125 apartment suites at the Bruce Street and Harmony Court buildings.

"It's a three-year waiting list," Ms Schau said.

No subsidized housing has been built in Halton since 1995, she said, adding Milton has just a 1.4 per cent vacancy rate.

"A lack of affordable housing has ramifications," she said. "Two people who make minimum wage don't make enough to live in an apartment."

She said there needs to be a greater public desire for affordable housing, and added one of the barriers to that is people saying "Not in my backyard."

There is some hope on the horizon, Ms Schau said, with land set aside for future apartment buildings in some parts of Milton.

Elaine McGuigan was one of the seniors who attended the discussion. She said it doesn't make sense for the government to focus on health care and education, but not affordable housing, because the first is necessary to attain the second and third.

"We're losing out on a building block of what we're trying to accomplish," Ms McGuigan said, adding, "The type of place you're living in has a huge affect on your quality of life."

Walt Elliot, who was a local MPP from 1987 to 1990, said the key is to blend subsidized housing with non-subsidized, so those needing financial aid aren't stigmatized.

"I wish I was younger and had more energy, because the timing is right to get things done," he said.

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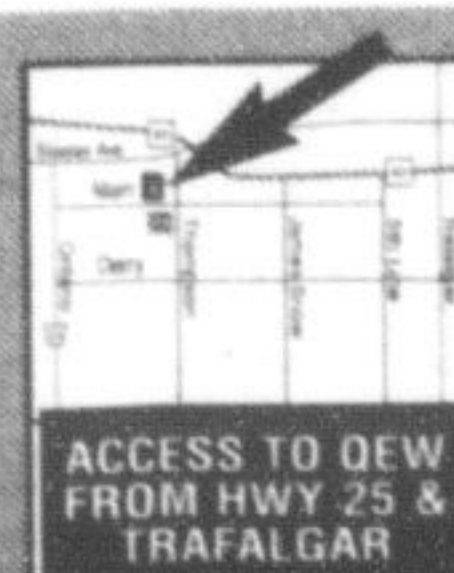
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