

# Housing strategy is being developed

By **MELANIE HENNESSEY**  
*The Champion*

Create homeless shelters that allow for a longer stay, build more units for single residents with limited financial resources and more universally-accessible dwellings — these were just a few of the suggestions made at a consultation session Wednesday on Halton's housing strategy.

Halton's human services advisory committees, along with Regional staff and councillors, gathered at the Halton Regional Centre to brainstorm on local housing issues and provide input for the comprehensive housing strategy that's currently being developed.

Each committee at the meeting had five minutes to make a presentation with its suggestions for the strategy.

Helen Ferguson, representing the Supportive Communities Partnership Initiative community advisory committee, took the floor first. She emphasized the urgency to address housing needs of homeless individuals and families, people with mental illness, disabilities and/or low income. "These groups experience a host of barriers in securing housing," she said.

Robert Baraniecki of the Halton Region Youth Advisory Committee said housing options must be provided for homeless youths. "Emergency housing and shelter should be provided for youth that is easy to access, yet affordable at the same time."

He said second-stage shelters are necessary to provide long-term housing for youths during the transitional period toward independent living. "In addition, HRYAC feels that shelter should be located in strategic locations throughout the region to provide accessibility for youths from all the municipalities."

Elizabeth Carmichael provided input from the Halton Diversity Advisory Committee (HDAC), North Halton Cultural Awareness Council (NHCAC) and also shared her own thoughts on housing needs. She said it's come to the attention of the HDAC that more consistent and accurate information on the application process for subsidized housing and eligi-

bility needs to be provided and should be translated into different languages.

As chairperson of the NHCAC, she said the lack of affordable housing in north Halton seems to be at a more critical level than in the south. "Isolation of the diverse community and lack of knowledge of available services could be the reasons."

She emphasized the need for more affordable housing, telling of the financial difficulties and stress she's faced with each month when it comes to deciding whether to pay rent, buy food, pay utilities, etc.

Lang Moffat and Carole Ward of the Elderly Services Advisory Committee stressed the importance of having communities with a mix of housing, such as apartments, family homes, retirement villages and special needs housing.

And with one in every nine Halton residents being over 65, Mr. Moffat said, "A variety of housing options are needed if these seniors are to remain in the community as they retire and age. Too many developments are being built for one demographic."

Halton Housing Advisory Committee Chair Arun Pathak said a key housing issue is to meet individual needs, such as taking into consideration 'visitability' of a dwelling, or its accessibility for disabled visitors.

Accessibility Advisory Committee citizen representative Terry Garipey raised similar points, noting the limited availability of accessible housing options in the market. "(We need to) encourage private builders to build accessible homes," she said.

Regional Chair Joyce Savoline pointed out the need for partnerships with other levels of government when it comes to housing. "We need the federal and provincial government to work with us," she stressed.

Following the consultation phase for the strategy from now until June, the document will be developed over the summer and presented to council in the fall.

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