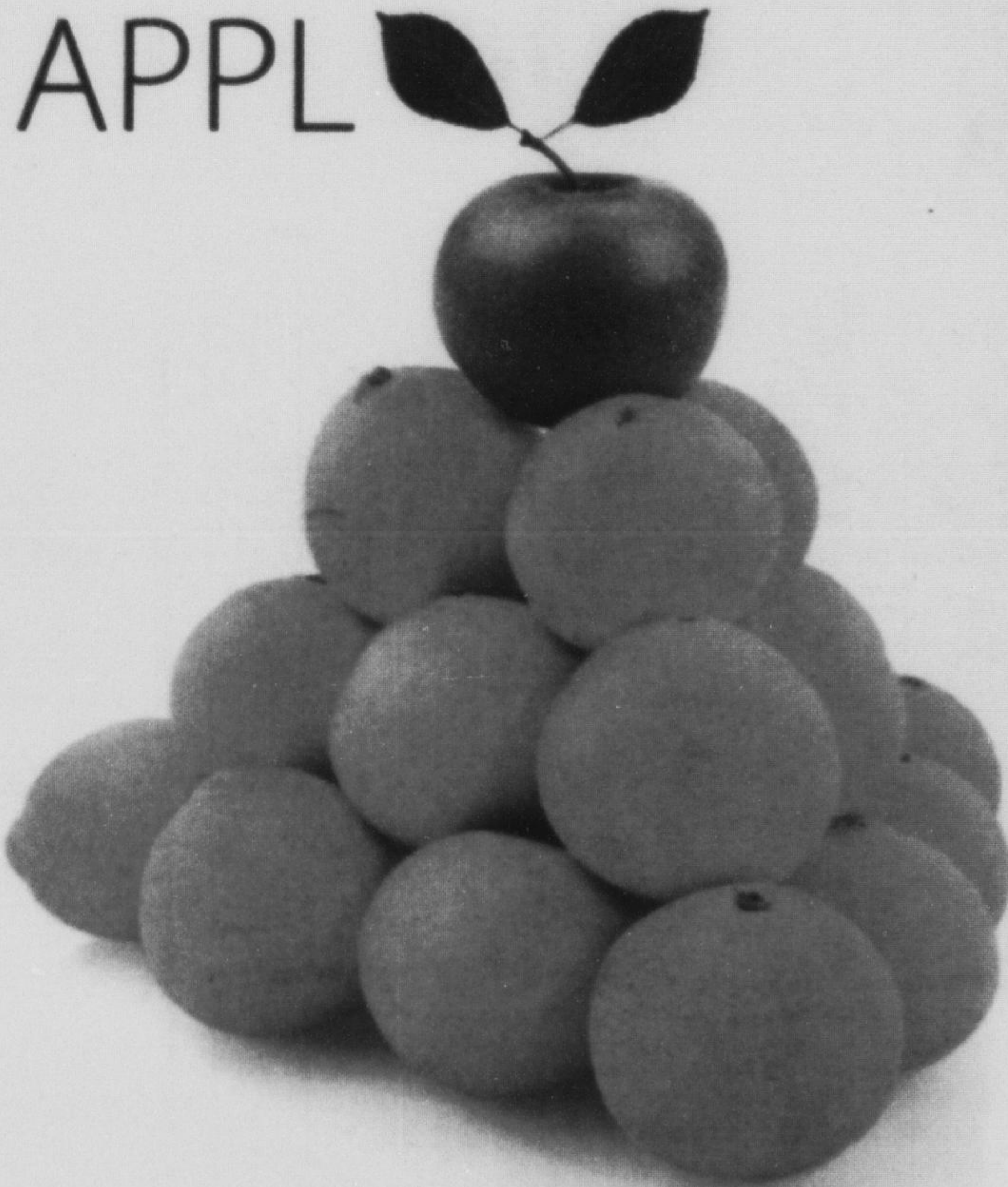


# ARE YOU DIFFERENT? GET READY TO



## Affordable housing discussed at length at committee meeting

By Julia Le  
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

There's no question the shortage of affordable housing continues to be one of Halton's most pressing problems, said Marc Hamel, co-chair of Halton Poverty Roundtable.

"In Halton, 20 per cent of families spend more than 30 per cent of their income on housing and that number is closer to 65 per cent when you consider low-income families," he told members of Halton Region's health and social services committee meeting last Tuesday.

Hamel, along with Halton Poverty Roundtable Community Development Director Anne Swarbrick, went before the committee to share the group's findings on the need for more affordable housing. A copy of the group's report, *Housing in Halton: Towards a More Shared Prosperity*, outlining recommendations on how the issue could be addressed, was given to committee members.

"Our vision is that everyone in Halton will have access to a home that is decent, stable and affordable in healthy neighbourhoods that promote social and economic inclusion," said Hamel.

He continued the group believes this could happen if the Region engages all the "relevant stakeholders in strategy development and delivery to maximize the leverage for change."

The cost of owning a home continues to grow quicker than a person's income and the challenge to find a place to rent is increasing with vacancy rates around 1.3 per cent, Hamel noted. The healthy standard for vacancy rates is around three per cent.

He said Halton is simply the hardest place to find a rental unit in all of the Greater Toronto Hamilton Area (GTHA).

Representatives from the Halton Housing Advisory Committee (HHAC) delivered a similar, but separate presentation on the need for more rental units based on its report on strategies to help stimulate the affordable rental

housing supply in Halton.

HHAC Chair Wendy Schau and HHAC member Lang Moffat told committee members there's just a lack of choice for people right now.

Moffat said Halton's rental rates are among the highest in the GTHA with a bachelor apartment costing around \$859 and a three-bedroom place going for \$1,353 a month.

"(Rates) went up three per cent in the last year alone," said Moffat. "High price is often the result of high demand for limited capacity or product available."

He also showed a slide based on the Region's 2011 State of Housing report, showing how over the last few years 300 to 700 people continue to need assisted housing.

"In the case of the affordable housing gap, you'll notice in the same four years the gap has grown and grown, and in four years it has practically doubled," he added.

According to the report, 300 to 800 people were in need of affordable housing in 2008 compared to 400 to 1,500 people in need of it in 2011.

Schau listed a number of strategies that could help increase the affordable rental housing supply to meet the housing needs of all Halton residents, which is presently unmet. Recommendations included equalizing the multi-residential property tax rate, providing land at low or no cost for rental development, using tax incentives to encourage new private rental development and encourage municipal governments to amend its zoning bylaws to allow for accessory dwelling units like basement apartments.

She also encouraged municipalities to explore Section 37 of Ontario's Planning Act as a way to negotiate affordable housing with developers in return for planning concessions.

Both presentations were followed by heavy discussion on the issue of affordable housing in the community, the creation of a possible housing help centre that could assist in connecting renters and landlords in Halton.

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