

# Housing Mix Recommended For Balanced Community In South Richmond Hill

Housing was the chief topic of concern at the annual meeting of Richmond Hill Social Planning Council's annual meeting May 16 in Don Head Secondary School.

Difficulties in identifying need, allocating responsibility and achieving the essential goal were humorously described by guest speaker Steve Lurie, planning associate with the Ontario Welfare Council in the reading of the satirical "Get-together" written by Stephen Leacock of Orillia 40 years ago.

In meeting the urgent need for housing in areas such as the Region of York can one single planning body, voluntary or public do all the planning? he asked.

"Should it be done by a government agency or a voluntary agency, and who should co-ordinate the program?"

In Mr. Lurie's opinion it should not be the province. A voluntary group does not have the public mandate of an elected body, but it can influence decisions. There are 35 social planning councils in the province and thousands of workers, but no one model that is standard. In small communities there are "inter-agencies" with executives such as clergy, service clubs and schools with no paid staff, yet they can make constructive proposals.

In communities such as Richmond Hill the volunteers lack

funds and the power to plan. Paid staff would broaden citizen participation and result in more effective potential for action. A United Fund could help in bringing this about, it would result in social agencies coming together to share information, but could also lead to competition for funds. Money raised for volunteer agencies are allocated through the United Fund.

He urged the volunteer not to be downgraded — to feel less competent than the elected or appointed official, for no matter how many volunteers there are, they do come together, and they do know more about the needs of their respective agencies than the government persons because of their personal involvement.

In Ontario, said Mr. Lurie, there are 12 municipalities with social planning councils with full-time staff, and \$1 million a year goes to funding social planning councils in Ontario. Six communities have one full-time paid worker, and in the metropolitan areas of Toronto and Ottawa there are 12 or more.

An effective paid staff or staff-worker could co-ordinate the activities of the volunteers, providing continuity of work and satisfaction for the volunteer. In situations where there

is no such co-operation, said Mr. Lurie, "It is hard to keep on beating your head against a wall."

The province, he said, is prepared to put up \$440,000 to assist such groups, quoting Provincial Secretary Robert Welch as saying, "Maybe there is nothing wrong in funding a loyal opposition."

In the matter of permanent-paid staffing, Mr. Lurie suggested that the regional government experiment in staffing the Richmond Hill SPC; that alternatively the Ministry of Community and Social Services hire a social worker to work with the community group on a part-time basis as an interim measure.

He also pointed out that many residents of Richmond Hill work in Metro and contribute to the Metro United Fund through payroll deductions. It would be quite legitimate, he said, to approach the Metro group to request money to pay staff, but he advised, "Don't throw all your eggs in one basket."

The Ontario Welfare Council, said Mr. Lurie, funds social development in providing consultants to groups and governments on aging, committees of social planning councils, action committees on day care, children's services and housing committees.

Following a coffee break there was a panel discussion on housing. Participants were Warren Harding of the Ontario Housing Corporation, Robin Whitelaw of the Provisional Housing Action Program, Kathy Pounder of the Richmond Hill Planning Department and Dan Burns, principal housing investigator for the Ontario Welfare Council. Moderator was SPC President David Schiller.

The OHC has operated for 10 years as a crown corporation, said Mr. Harding, as an arm of the provincial government. There is the rental housing division and the home ownership division.

OHC, he said, is not "low rental" but is geared to gross family income and provides family units of from five bedroom houses or suites to senior citizen accommodation.

Applications are point-rated and accommodated according to need. Homes are visited by OHC representatives and families or individuals listed according to priority of need. Rentals vary according to the size of the family, and in Metro it is "first come, first served."

The "HOME" plan introduced in Bramalea in 1965 permits families to buy houses at low prices on lots leased under the "Home Ownership Made Easy" plan.

There is also provision for mortgage financing in condominiums, providing money for first and second mortgages with builders and developers. Twenty-five per cent of such units in the province are government subsidized, said Mr. Harding.

Also subsidized by the province is student housing at universities and colleges, both on-campus housing managed by the university and off-campus housing for under-graduate and post-graduate students.

Mr. Whitelaw attributed the increased cost of housing partly to higher land costs, and to the lack of serviced land for building. Costs, he said, have risen up to 340 per cent in 10 years.

At the local level, he said, regional and municipal goals should be set that "housing action areas" should be designated, and deadlines for development set.

At the provincial level, Mr. Whitelaw said, local disincentives should be removed. There should be grants to eliminate tax increases; major water, sewage and other essential service studies should be undertaken; and once a municipality has agreed to negotiate with a developer it should be guaranteed provincial support.

Viewing the housing situation

from the municipal level, Miss Pounder said there have been no direct statements regarding (low rental) housing in the Richmond Hill plan. "It is a process that takes time."

And times costs money, said Miss Pounder. The time involved in citizen participation delays the start of housing projects, and the added cost is reflected in the rentals and mortgages.

To meet the housing need, there should be a "housing mix" of middle income and low income housing units. Standards, too, might be reduced. She cited Kitchener where services are run at the back of properties, not underpinned, on "zero" lot lines.

Miss Pounder's recommendation that the SPC ask council to consider amendments to the Official Plan, reduce minimum property frontage laws, that low rental and low-dividend housing be incorporated into the Lake Wilcox study, and that mobile home development be considered, was approved by the meeting.

Mr. Burns pointed out that there are many new opportunities for local governments to introduce innovative housing concepts, that there is a place for citizen organizations in determining the type of housing that will go into the community.

Not only is there provincial support, there are also federal capital grants available at low interest rates for first time owners. There is also a provincial home renewal plan for owners or purchasers of older homes.

Many factors must be considered — physical planning, zoning, pace of development, the quality of housing, services, emergency housing, pay-shelter requirements, mobile homes, etc.

Much information is available through workshops, research, pamphlets, reports and briefs on local planning, and that local pressure can always be brought to bear through ratepayer and tenant groups, those acting on behalf of the handicapped, group homes, etc. He referred also to building co-operatives and housing programs which could be organized under the auspices of the Ontario Welfare Council.

In reply to a question from Regional Councillor Lois Hancey, Mr. Harding said that OHC is prepared to meet the need of "rent geared to income" in a municipality only when it is officially asked by the municipality to do a survey of need. The survey is then analyzed before OHC moves into the community.

Ward 6 Councillor Lou Wainwright thanked the panelists,

adding that he had many unanswered questions regarding "municipally set standards" and "mortgages dried up" as well as some of the extensive changes in National Housing requirements, upstream sewage plants, etc., but he realized specific information was not at hand, referring to the Handelman Report on Housing and questions he would like to ask Housing Minister Sidney Handelman.

Mrs. Marylo Graham asked if there is a "nasty segment" in the unshoused, people who have to go without separate housing, particularly those under 30 who are forced by economics to double up in order to survive.

Mr. Burns replied that age 31 is the average for first-time home ownership.

Mrs. Gwen Halliday was concerned about the amount of housing available. What kind of pressure is being brought on various levels of government to provide incentives, such as tax cuts for a few years, that would make it possible for more people to own their own houses?

Another SPC Member Eric George observed that the province seems to be moving north, decentralizing, concentrating on public housing in communities such as Brasilia rather than in commercially, industrially and residentially booming areas such as Richmond Hill.

# Task Forces Survey Housing, Day Care Needs For Social Planners

**By MARGARET LADE**

Housing was the topic for discussion at the annual meeting of Richmond Hill Social Planning Council at Don Head Secondary School May 16, but the interest of audience and participants extended far beyond the mere matter of shelter.

Speaker and panelists delved into the social implications, economics, recreational, commercial and industrial factors affected by and affecting location, desirability and density of housing.

The meeting concerned itself with the health needs, education and cultural requirements that should be considered before, rather than after, housing is put in, as well as ways of meeting such needs in established areas where they are not at present available.

Chaired by SPC President Dave Schiller, the meeting heard reports from the South Richmond Hill (formerly BAIF) Task Force, the Emergency Housing Committee, an address on public housing, and a panel discussion on housing in general.

**THE NEW VS. THE OLD**

Reporting conclusion drawn by the task force, Mike Burnie said five significant areas of divergence between the old community of Richvale and the new BAIF development had come to light: year of immigration, age, education, occupation and income.

**STABILIZE COMMUNITY**

Information gathered indicated that Richvale residents are less likely to move than are their BAIF neighbors, indicating the age composition may tend to diverge even more until BAIF residents settle in and the community stabilizes.

In education there was less disparity — 27 per cent with university education in BAIF, 21 per cent in Richvale. The difference in occupational class and income was far more dramatic. Forty-four per cent of the BAIF sample were in the professional/managerial/technical occupations, but only 30 per cent of the Richvale sample fell into this category. Economically, 47 per cent of BAIF respondents made more than \$15,000 a year, and 25 per cent of Richvale residents were in this economic bracket. Only 5.7 per cent of BAIF residents reported incomes of less than \$10,000, while 27 per cent of Richvale residents made \$10,000 or less.

"The age difference is the factor that will probably have the most bearing on the manner in which the two populations will interact," said the report.

"People in different stages of life cycle have fewer opportunities to meet one another

other through school-related activities, and are less likely to have common interests and concerns."

**IDENTITY ISSUE**

An awareness of this should be useful to planning officials, citizens' groups and all concerned about the unity and identity issues in southern Richmond Hill, said Mr. Burnie.

Richvale residents showed most concern, worrying about overcrowding of physical facilities, general congestion and loss of the rural atmosphere of their present environment.

They are, however, said the report, aware of benefits the new development could bring in terms of new facilities and improved services. They want more recreational facilities, better public transportation services and sewers.

Richvale residents, on the whole, have difficulty identifying with Richmond Hill, feeling they are "second-class" citizens in relation to the rest of the town. They want greater involvement in the planning in their area and would like more information on the BAIF development to make their concerns known to the planning authorities.

In the first phases of its operation, the task force had found BAIF representatives

reluctant to express opinions, but as the year went on they became more involved, more concerned, more willing to participate in discussion and offer opinions; the committee found.

**EMERGENCY HOUSING**

The SPC's emergency housing implementation committee report was presented by Bob Kennedy. The committee, he said, felt that at least one housing unit should be available for short-term use for legitimate reasons, for families that were stranded — burned out — flooded out — evicted.

The meeting agreed to continue to explore ways and means of obtaining such a unit.

Mr. Schiller thanked the task force and the housing committee, acknowledging the valued contribution of Helpmate-Information in conducting the survey on emergency housing needs that formed the statistical basis for implementing the committee.

**DAY CARE NEED**

He referred also to the appointment in the early months of 1973-74 board year of a task force on day care to assess the current local need for such services and evaluate various forms of both private and public means of filling this role.

The task force, Mrs. Ellen Smith, Mrs. Barbara Mann, Mrs. Pauline Barrett and Mrs. Winona MacDonald, reported to the board in October. They described the need for expanding local service as "very substantial".

"Surveys recently conducted by York Regional Department of Social Services indicate that day care service needs on a regional basis are truly massive," said Mr. Schiller. "The report of the task force, along with correspondence urging immediate action to expand the service in this community and volunteering the council's assistance in setting up a regional day care advisory committee were forwarded to

York Region and to our own town council."

There had to date been no positive response to the SPC request, Mr. Schiller said, and so remains a problem of considerable urgency and frustration.

**CITIZEN PLANNING**

A citizens' advisory group on planning and policy was formed last fall to encourage a more meaningful role for residents of the town in the planning of the community, said Mr. Schiller. The proposal for such a group had come from the (then) BAIF Task Force, and the group is now operating on its own, providing a vehicle for citizen participation in planning.

Turning to finances, Mr. Schiller said the council now feels the time has come when paid staff is needed to adequately serve the needs of the community with its extended geographical boundaries and burgeoning population.

"As a consequence, considerable effort has been expended these past months in attempting to secure staff funding. We have been unsuccessful. Many social planning councils receive funds from the local United Appeal. Unfortunately no such organization is yet in existence in the Region of York.

"If it were, and if the per capita donations were similar to that of Metro, a non-government fund in excess of \$1 million per annum would be available to social agencies throughout the region," Mr. Schiller continued.

**STAFF NEEDS**

"There are, to be sure, short-comings to the United Appeal approach, but at the moment this looks like the best long term solution to the problem. A short term solution remains elusive and has led some to question the continued existence of a viable social planning council in Richmond Hill."

Paradoxically, Mr. Schiller observed, in this age of general abundance the need for

social action seems to grow rather than diminish.

In the next year the new board of the SPC must decide its priorities, he concluded, thanking the outgoing board for its valued support in the past 12 months.

Continuing on the board are Ann Gold and Shirley Stanley. Newly elected at the meeting were Donald Binney, Mike Burnie, Hugo Jackson, Dorothy McIlhenny, Bruce Venn, Merle George and Dorothy Gummersall. Mr. Schiller declined nomination for another year.

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