

YOU'LL WAIT 10 YEARS FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

BY SEAN PEARCE

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Looking for affordable accommodations in York Region? Don't make plans for the next 10 years or so.

The waiting list for rent-geared-to-income units is about 9,500 families long, meaning some of those families will wait a decade or more for subsidized housing, depending on the size of unit they seek and their desired location, community and health services commissioner Adelina Urbanski said.

Part of the reason the waiting list has grown by leaps and bounds is because there's just no supply out there, Ms Urbanski said, adding things worsened when the economic downturn hit.

And while the region would like to build more affordable housing to meet the growing need, funding — or lack thereof — limits how much help it can provide.

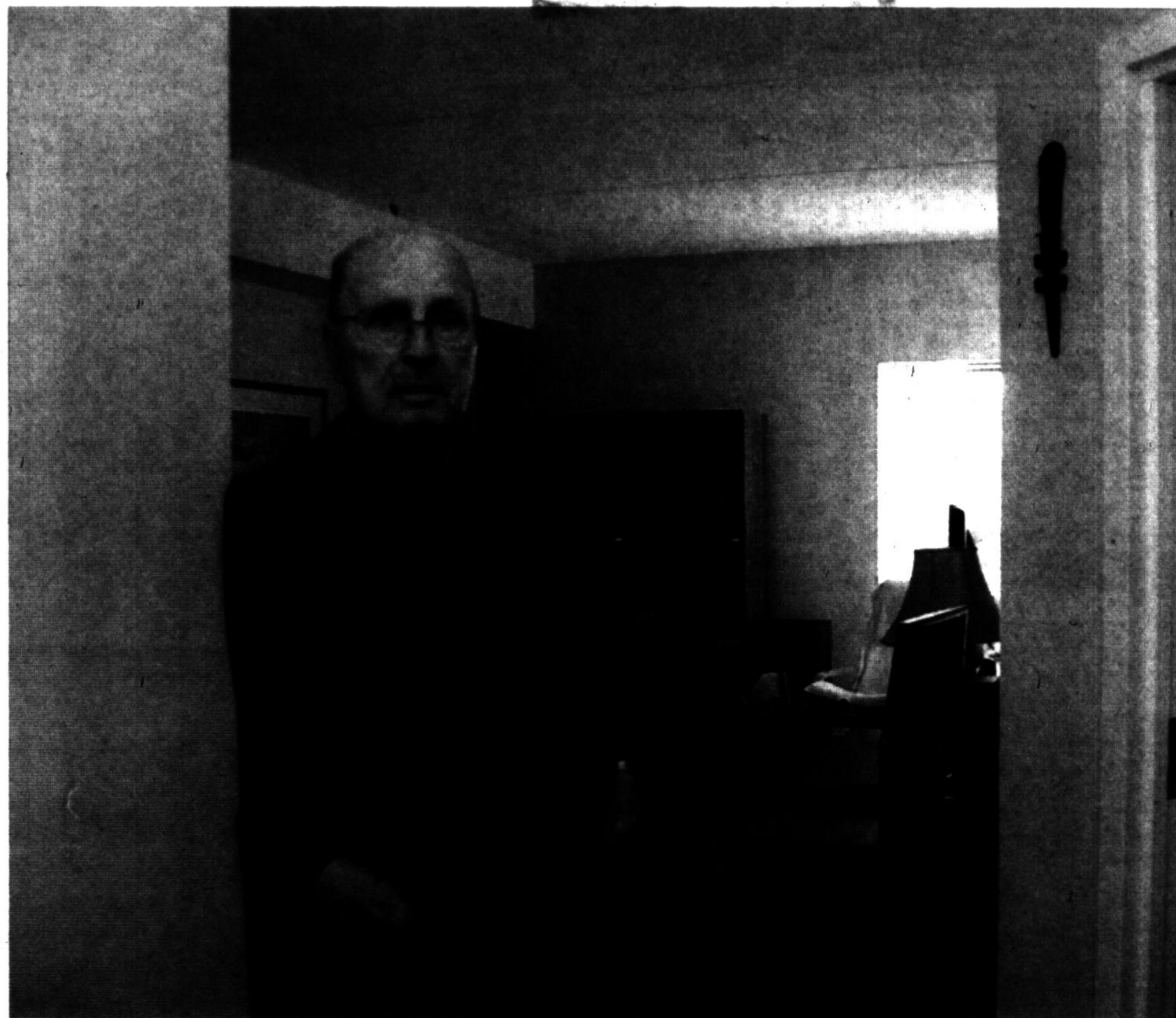
For that reason, most, if not all, buildings built by Housing York in recent memory incorporate a mix of market-rent suites and rent-geared-to-income units. The advantage is the pricier apartments and homes help make the subsidized housing possible.

Housing York's Mackenzie Green project, slated to open this year, serves to showcase this new approach to affordable housing development because it is meant to bring together tenants of all economic strata and is situated in an established residential area.

Rather than isolated from the Richmond Hill community, Mackenzie Green is intended to be part of it.

Unfortunately, the term, affordable housing, still carries a lot of baggage and the mere mention of the term conjures dreary images of soulless, grey concrete.

It was not long ago when bland and isolated was de rigueur when it came to affordable housing, Ms Urbanski said, explaining the focus today is on building more complete communities that incorporate a diverse mix of individuals and families.



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

Kingsview Court resident Gary Sloan stands in his subsidized one-bedroom apartment. A longtime renter, Mr. Sloan says this type of housing suits his needs best.

Luckily, attitudes toward social housing have also changed, she added.

"With our latest building in Richmond Hill, we've had no problem in renting our market-rent units," she said, adding the surrounding community has been welcoming.

"Our society is more equal and we don't force people to live in certain areas because of their income level.

"We know that to develop good communities, we need to bring together people of diverse cultural and economic backgrounds."

Those neighbourhoods are typi-



On the web: Visit yorkregion.com for a look at Kingsview Court housing suites.

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cally the most vibrant, she added.

However, not all affordable housing developments are welcomed with open arms.

The proposed Richmond Hill Housing and Community Hub on the east side of Yonge Street, north of Crosby Avenue, has faced opposition from many residents.

Ward 2 Councillor Carmine Perrelli has taken up the cause of those

against the proposed nine-storey, 202-unit mixed-income building. It would also serve as home to a drop-in centre, community hub, emergency shelter and transitional housing for youth, and has launched a petition, dubbed Stop Bad Planning, aimed at making the region reconsider its choice of location.

The petition has almost 700 signatures, Mr. Perrelli said, adding

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residents have taken issue with the lack of notice about the region's intentions and the price of the land in question.

They're also asking why there are more affordable housing units in Ward 2 than there are in all of either Markham or Vaughan.

Some people are also worried about the site's proximity to Genesis Place, another affordable housing building, he said, stressing neither he nor those he represents are anti-affordable housing.

"Where are the studies that say it's a good idea to concentrate your subsidized housing all in one place?" Mr. Perrelli said.

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