

OPINION



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Editorial

Affordable housing does not mean slum living

ISSUE

Many of our children and parents can't afford to live in York Region.

If you read On the Home Front, our multi-part housing series that wrapped up last week, you know it costs a small fortune to buy a home in York Region.

You also know finding affordable rental accommodation is no picnic either.

And that's a shame.

It means a bright part of our future — many of those recent grads who grew up in York Region — are forced to leave their hometowns to find somewhere to live.

Some of our baby boomers and seniors are also forced to depart as they retire or downsize.

And as a community, we suffer as a result. Our series was not a campaign pushing for more social housing. Indeed, more subsidized and rent-g geared-to-income housing is part of our solution, but there are many more pieces needed to complete the affordable housing puzzle.

What we need are homes suitable for a variety of incomes, including couples who work decent jobs here, but have to live elsewhere.

The average cost of a detached home here now tops \$700,000. With the average Ontarian pulling in just more than \$47,000 last year before taxes and deductions, how is York Region affordable?

Many who enter our market are putting themselves in peril, hanging on by their fingernails as they spend a vast amount of their take-home pay on housing.

Almost one in three York Region households spent 30 per cent or more of their incomes on housing in 2006, compared to 22.6 per cent in 2001.

According to the region, 13.5 per cent spend 70 per cent of their incomes on housing. If interest rates soar, a lot of our neighbours are in trouble.

We don't all need two-story

detached brick homes on tree-lined streets. What we need is a greater mix of development, including more rental units.

Toronto's housing stock is almost evenly divided between rental units and owned homes, at 46 per cent to 54 per cent, respectively, whereas 88 per cent of homes in York Region are owned and just 12 per cent are rentals. The vacancy rate here hovers around the 1-per-cent mark, compared to the 3-per-cent target experts say indicates a healthy rental market.

Allowing and regulating accessory dwellings — basement apartments — in more municipalities would bolster our rental stockpile. So, too, would encouraging developers to build more apartment buildings and rental units, as mentioned in last week's story.

For this to happen, we don't just need bricks and mortar. We also need an attitude adjustment.

Mention affordable housing and many are quick to jump to the stereotype of urban slums filled with welfare cheats and hardened criminals.

Feedback from some readers indicates this.

So does the NIMBY-fuelled reaction to Richmond Hill's planned Hub development, approved by councillors during a committee meeting this week.

When we talk about the need for affordable housing, we're talking about places to live for your kids and your parents.

When built, Richmond Hill's Hub will include a 202-unit mixed-income housing complex, a commercial/social enterprise space and a range of services for youth, such as emergency and transitional housing and drop-in centre.

It's a shining example of what we need. And for York Region to become that whole, inclusive community we all desire, we all need to recognize this.

BOTTOM LINE: Mixed-income housing is necessary to ensure an inclusive community.

LETTER OF THE WEEK

Time to revisit our hyphenated name, Whitchurch-Stouffville

What's in a name? Bradford West Gwillimbury, Plympton-Wyoming and Clarence-Rockland, together with Whitchurch-Stouffville, are the only hyphenated communities left in Ontario.

Admittedly, hyphenated names are a mouthful and difficult to brand — and I should know, my students typically call me "Dr. Arnold" and take a pass on the hyphenated last name.

Historically the community of Stouffville, as well as Gormley and Ringwood, straddled the old Townships of Whitchurch and Markham within York County.

Whitchurch was the English home town of Lt. Gov. John Graves Simcoe's wife, Elizabeth. Would she be forgotten if we were called "Stouffville"? I doubt it; our town crest preserves that link.

Moreover, Elizabeth Simcoe's maiden name, Gwillim, continues to be honoured in the nearby communities of East and West Gwillimbury.

The old Township of Whitchurch included the communities of Ballantrae, Vandorf, Musselman's Lake and 13 other Whitchurch-Stouffville hamlets.

Today, each is well represented with attractive signage, heritage buildings and through our museum — as they should be. But the population in these hamlets will

decline in the coming years, according to town planners.

The community Stouffville, however, is mandated to add another 20,000 people by 2031 and the town is forecasting an additional 9,000 jobs on already designated employment lands.

Stouffville needs to do the heavy lifting on behalf of the whole town to attract business. Branding would be easier with one name: Stouffville.

When Markham was amalgamated with Unionville, Thornhill and Buttonville among other communities in 1972, residents "bit the bullet" and settled on a single name.

Whitchurch-Stouffville and Bradford West Gwillimbury (both created by the province on the same day in 1971) avoided the tough political decision, however.

Newspapers of both towns, along with other businesses, pragmatically chose to reject the adoption of the hyphenated names of their towns. Over time, many residents have as well.

Sometimes less is indeed more. We may be in good company with Plympton-Wyoming and Clarence-Rockland, but let's do our town's economic development officer a favour — perhaps in the context of the upcoming municipal election — and revisit our official name.

ARNOLD NEUFELDT-FAST
WHITCHURCH-STOUFFVILLE

Food drive succeeded because you cared

We extend our deepest gratitude to The Sun-Tribune for the coverage and publicity for our food drive last weekend.

We appreciate every food donation and monetary gift given from the generous hearts of this caring community. Our thanks to Mayor Wayne Emmerson

HAVE YOUR SAY, STOUFFVILLE

► What do you think of these issues or any others?
E-mail jmason@yrmg.com

for his continuing support, the firefighters for their volunteered time, the stu-

dents for their participation and Stouffville Toyota for the pick-up trucks used to transport the food.

It was a glorious example of the wonderful community where we live.

Because you cared, we now can share with those who have hit a rough patch.

Thank you one and all

MARION WELLS
CO-ORDINATOR
WHITCHURCH-STOUFFVILLE
FOOD BANK

Care to contribute?

Is there an issue about which you are passionate? You could be a Saturday Forum contributor and get the chance to have your piece published along with your name and headshot. E-mail your 450-word submission to jmason@yrmg.com