

Third Age Barrie Zoom Presentation – Notes 16 May 2023

Topic: **Seniors Co-Housing by Gwen Kavanagh, Chair of CARP Barrie Chapter 36**

A very interesting, informative, and solution-based presentation. Gwen Kavanagh is passionate about Co-housing as a viable solution to accommodating seniors in a safe, shared, economic, social, and supportive environment. She has followed the remodeling of a two-story home in Barrie with a walkout basement to make it a multi-unit dwelling with private bedrooms, sitting rooms and bathrooms on three levels with a common kitchen, living-room area, laundry, etc. and an elevator to service the three levels with three garages and a wide driveway to accommodate up to nine cars. They were faced with a public backlash by neighbours of Not in My Back Yard (NIMBY) which highlighted biases, misconceptions and misunderstanding of having multiple seniors living in a neighbourhood. The truth is that seniors are good neighbours in that they would maintain their property by hiring contractors to maintain their lawns and gardens (landscape), driveway (snow removal in winter) and maintenance of their dwelling. Seniors are not boisterous, so would be quiet neighbours who go to bed early and get regular visits for their health needs. Each senior buys or rents an undivided interest in the home consisting of a bedroom, a sitting room and a private bathroom and together they share all the common areas. Ownership is based on “Tenants in Common” or a rental agreement with the investor/owner of the suite. Each owner is equal, having voting rights and operational rights. Decisions are democratic and Co-houses are self governed and self-financed.

Gwen thinks that the City of Barrie could capitalize on available open spaces, such as unused parking spaces and intensification to put in place multiple Co-housing homes (up to six owners/renters) with common rooms (e.g., kitchen, dining room, living room, laundry, possibly a workshop). This could be accomplished by encouraging developers to build Co-housing units to sell or rent (including utilities), built to a standard that accommodates seniors in terms of safety (railings in halls, accessibility improvements such as wide doorways, wheelchair access, large bathrooms to accommodate walkers, grab bars in bathrooms etc., elevators for convenience and large kitchens to accommodate large fridges and stoves, light switches positioned lower on walls). Modular Home builders could be encouraged to design suitable models that could be built in factories, brought to the site location, and assembled. Desjardins Insurance and some Municipalities in Ontario have established boards to vet and approve local contractors and engaged the local builders’ association. They should require input from Shelley Raymond of Solterra.

Gwen believes in the slogan “How you start is how you go!” For example, there should be a process for putting the right people together and for the Owners/ Renters to set the rules for practices democratically, with equal voting rights and operational rights.

NOTE: Summary of presentation attended by Leo Brooks, Advocacy Director, Huronia Branch