



Hamilton needs to develop co-housing options

(As appeared in the Hamilton Spectator May 19, 2020)

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During the current Covid-19 crisis, we're getting a real sense of what it's like to be isolated and finding ourselves striving to connect with each other in any way we can. English author John Donne coined the phrase, "No man is an island" meaning no one is truly self-sufficient, everyone must rely on the company and comfort of others in order to thrive.

Cohousing is one solution. Cohousing is a form of intentional community for older adults or intergenerational living where people create a neighbourhood that combines the autonomy of privately owned individual dwellings with the advantages of shared resources and community living. Residents enjoy the best of both worlds, striking their own balance between privacy and community.

Co-developed, co-designed and managed by the residents, a cohousing community typically consists of between 10 and 35 dwelling units, plus common space. It's economically friendly with lower monthly living expenses and the opportunity to share resources such as tools, equipment and services. And cohousing communities tend to be environmentally friendly with residents typically choosing a sustainable lifestyle.

Here, residents live both independently and interdependently; they can also age with verve. Cohousing communities are based on values of reciprocity, respect, tolerance and compromise. Age is not seen as a negative or something to hide from. It's seen as a welcome chapter which can be as fun, exciting and rewarding as the more youthful chapters, but with the added bonus of wisdom that only comes with age. Residents in cohousing benefit from a rich built-in social network and mutual support system. It's a place to age with resilience, joy, anticipation and humour.

My mother lived with my husband and me for the last 10 years of her life and even though she had a sense of security and comfort in not living alone, she was in fact on her own a lot because my husband and I both worked. I can't help but think how much more companionship and

stimulation she could have enjoyed had she been living in a cohousing community.

Seniors in cohousing neither live alone, potentially feeling bored, lonely and isolated, nor are they passive observers where everything is done for them. They are part of a vibrant community, contributing and participating at a level they can and recognised as an invaluable part of the fabric that makes up the community.

Most people spend more time planning a vacation than they do creating a vision for the last one third of their life. As a baby boomer, getting real about how we will live out our elderhood is a worthwhile conversation to have. Most people spend two-thirds of their life accumulating stuff and the last third getting rid of it. These latter years are an opportunity to be creative in ways we never were before; able to craft our future and focus on values other than material.

Cohousing offers opportunities for aging together not normally seen in seniors housing, including the ability to respond more effectively to the evolving needs and desires of older persons where people know their neighbours, care about them and support them at some level. Individuals can benefit from the collective wisdom of the group.

As one resident in an existing cohousing community commented, “We are all stewards in the ebb and flow of our living landscape which allows us to know, therefore care, and therefore support each other without hindering each other's lives. To learn to grow old together is a natural part of life, more of a freeing experience than an encumbering one.”

Choosing how and where to grow old is an integral step in taking control of one's future. Cohousing is not meant to be a panacea nor will it come without its challenges but it's something to consider and if there's one thing baby boomers have always had, and will continue to want, it's options and a desire to maintain control of their lives. After all, having a good time as you age is no accident – it's a lifestyle choice.

Hamilton is an Age Friendly City modelled on the World Health Organization's Age Friendly Cities Guide (WHO AFCG) and housing is a key area of a successful age friendly implementation plan. Hamilton's Social Planning and Research Council has identified growing population pressure, an increasingly tight housing market and rapidly rising rental costs as limiting housing options for older as well as younger Hamiltonians. Cohousing is a missing option in Hamilton.

Cohousing Hamilton, under the auspices of Hamilton Aging in Community, hamiltonagingtogether.ca, is in its start-up phase. Watch for informational and new member sessions coming up in the next few months. For more information contact Judy Shepalo at cohousinghamilton@gmail.com or call 905-517-6494.

For information or to donate to the Hamilton Council on Aging please see <https://coahamilton.ca>