

Town to supplement rental costs of health centre to retain physicians

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Shelburne Town Council will be supplementing the rental cost of a medical facility for three local doctors in 2025.

During their meeting on Dec. 9, Shelburne Town Council received a report from Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) Denyse Morrissey regarding the North Dufferin Wellness Centre. Council unanimously supported a recommendation to supplement a rental increase for 2025 in order to continue the retention of family physicians.

Dr. Amy Catania, one of the three physicians at North Dufferin Wellness Centre Primary Care Clinic, delegated to Shelburne Town Council during their Nov. 4 meeting and outlined the issues and challenges they've faced since 2018 as tenants of their building.

In 2018, Dr. Catania and other health care providers in the community came together to open the North Dufferin Wellness Centre, located at 712 Main Street, as a 'patient medical home' or a one-stop medical centre for patients.

The medical and health practitioners located at the North Dufferin Wellness Centre include; the North Dufferin Wellness Centre Primary Care Clinic, consisting of Dr. Amy Catania, Dr. Natasha Gill, and Dr. Sonya Caruso; Shelburne Physio Centre; Shelburne Town Pharmacy; and Hear Right Canada.

Since opening the facility, Dr. Catania said the tenants have dealt with a number of issues and challenges related to the three landlords including bills not being paid, mould, leaks in the roof and basement, property disrepair and animals.

She noted that they've since received a letter indicating their latest landlord's intention to increase their rent.

'I ask you, how much would you tolerate, how much money would you put in yourself before you say 'I can't do this anymore'. We have to come up with another option or we have to leave and that's the point we're at,' said Dr. Catania.

The Ontario College of Family Physicians reported in July that there are about 2.5 million people in Ontario who do not have a family doctor.

According to the Hills of Headwaters Collaborative Ontario Health Team, the estimated number of local community members needing access to primary and team-based care was over 15,000 as of March 2022.

With the population of the area projected to increase 37 per cent by 2031, Dufferin County and Caledon would require 43 additional family physicians - 14 for Dufferin County and 29 for Caledon - in the next seven years to keep up with population growth.

The report to Shelburne Council indicated that the three physicians at the North Dufferin Wellness Centre see 3,627 patients of which 1,035 or roughly 28 per cent are from Shelburne and 1,550 or 42 per cent are from Dufferin County.

'All we're asking for is a stable location with a stable landlord. We love Shelburne and we probably care for a bunch of your family member or friends. We know our patients need us. We know there's no public transportation in this community, but we will have to leave if nothing can come out of this.'

According to the report the North Dufferin Wellness Centre has a rent of \$23.50 per square foot for 2024 and is expected to increase to \$34.80 per square foot for a total of \$3,138.58 per month in 2025.

?The recommended supplement of \$3,139 represents the actual monthly rental increase that was identified by the doctors when they were last here. That's the difference between what they're paying in rent now,? clarified Shelburne Mayor Wade Mills.

The Town of Shelburne will be supplementing the rental cost for the three doctors at North Dufferin Wellness Centre for 2025.