

Need grows for seniors housing

With Dufferin County's aging population choosing to remain in the county throughout their final years, Community Services is viewing a two-pronged approach to resolving an expanding and urgent need to provide affordable and in many cases assisted living.

The urgency of the need has been determined by a study of age-related census data from 2006 to 2011. In that five-year span, the over-55 population grew by roughly 20.5 per cent to 14,060 from 11,670.

The greatest percentage growth in that time was in the age 60-64 group (33.2%) and the 65-69 (29.1%). Perhaps surprisingly, the age 80-84 population grew to 960 from 820, a 17.1% increase, while the population of those aged 85-plus went to 860 from 730, a growth of 17.8%.

Although a Community Services report makes no attempt to project specific numbers into the future, it appears to presume that the five-year record is most likely to continue into the future, and sees the present availability of seniors housing as inadequate.

According to a chart, the county owns only 195 seniors units. These are in Shelburne, Orangeville and Grand Valley. It has 24 coming on stream in 2014, at the Dynes Gray Apartments (the former Shelburne hospital).

The supply of Affordable and RGI (rent geared to income) seniors housing will need to expand in order to keep up with the rising demand for affordable accommodations for those in and entering retirement, says Community Services Director Keith Palmer.

The Dynes Gray Apartments in Shelburne will address some of the need in Shelburne and North Dufferin, however Orangeville's growth in population aged 55 years and older from 2006-2011 suggests more will be needed in Dufferin's largest urban area. As indicated in the County's forthcoming 10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan, at least one new senior housing project should be added in the next ten years, Mr. Palmer says in his report.

At the same time, the county is creating a hub from which it can offer assisted living to seniors requiring it. This hub, however, would be able to offer assistance within only two km of Dufferin Oaks, and then only to about 15 seniors who might wish to remain in their own homes but require assistance to do so.

Apart from the county-owned properties, the Lord Dufferin Centre has 78 beds, and Montgomery Village will have 135 when construction has been completed. Those are not specifically long-term care facilities but Lord Dufferin has many amenities and social programs for seniors.

Avalon has 137 long-term care beds and 77 retirement units in Orangeville. Bethsaida has 30.

Shelburne Residence has 60 long-term care and 28 retirement beds.

By Wes Keller