

## From the Editor's Desk



BY TREVOR GREENWAY  
Editor in Chief

## CREDIT WHERE CREDIT'S DUE

Over the years, you've likely read several editorials by this editor slamming La Pêche council for its inaction when it comes to affordable housing.

I've dragged councillors and Mayor Guillaume Lamoureux through the mud over the decision to go ahead with building its \$11 million town hall when locals are struggling to pay rent or afford groceries. I've decried recent budget decisions and questioned La Pêche's priorities when it hiked taxes over 13 per cent in two years, with no money put aside for affordable housing.

But the municipality had something up its sleeve – a hidden ace on the river it was waiting to play. And it dropped that card last fall when it donated 2.5 acres of land in Wakefield for Cohabitat Wakefield to build its 41-unit coop housing project behind the former village carwash.

Halleluja! Finally, a decision for the people.

And while 2.5 acres of land may not be much for La Pêche, it's everything that the volunteers at Cohabitat needed to really get the ball rolling on their project. Without this land, the group had been stuck in the mud – a brilliant idea, but nowhere for it to go. The group tried hard to negotiate a land deal with the National Capital Commission near the Hwy 5 roundabout, however, that fell through.

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Before it had secured land, Cohabitat president Louise Chatelain said the group kept hitting walls. It couldn't get a hydrogeological study done; it couldn't do an environmental study, and it couldn't complete its feasibility study to show funders that the project was viable. Now that they have the land, they are starting to see what progress looks like. They've already landed a free professional project manager who will help them oversee the project from start to finish. The next step is to develop a strategic plan to move the project forward. None of these things would have happened without La Pêche's generous donation.

And if we're talking about giving credit where credit's due, the lion's share should really go to Chatelain and her crew of volunteers who started this whole project seven years ago. It all started with an idea – an idea to make life a little bit easier for locals in the Hills. When Chatelain started this project, she was wondering where she and many other aging residents were going to live when they got older. Realizing there were few options for seniors, she and others began down the path of creating the housing co-op. They realized along the way that it's more than just seniors who need help; it's young professionals, single moms and dads, and young families who can no longer afford skyrocketing rents or mortgages in the region.

But what's key is the volunteers' unwillingness to give up. When Chatelain first started working on this project in 2017, she thought it would be a two-year campaign. Seven years later, her group just got land and it will be at least another two years before it's built. But Chatelain is still there. Her co-volunteers, many of whom are in their 60s, are still there.

This is what change looks like at the local level. It may take seven years to see it, but if we continue to have people like Chatelain and her dedicated team who never give up, we can realize so many of these ideas to make our region a better place to live.



## COHABITAT WAKEFIELD TAKES GIANT

### NON-PROFIT SCORES FREE LAND FROM LA PÊCHE, PROJECT MANAGER

BY TREVOR GREENWAY  
Local Journalism Initiative

One major barrier that the volunteers at Cohabitat Wakefield repeatedly encountered when trying to build their 41-unit cooperative housing project in the village was the lack of land.

The lack of land left the group spinning its tires. They couldn't apply for grants, conduct environmental, geotechnical, or hydrology studies, or present a feasibility study to show how crucial a cooperative housing model is in Wakefield, which lacks rental properties and has skyrocketing housing prices.

But the project got traction after the municipality of La Pêche stepped up and donated 2.5 acres of prime land just behind the Wakefield Fire Hall and former car wash.

"We were excited like you wouldn't believe," said Cohabitat Wakefield president Louise Chatelain, standing with co-volunteer



Cohabitat Wakefield president Louise Chatelain (left) and co-volunteer Francine Costa pose in front of the land that will soon become home to their co-op housing project in Wakefield. Photo: Trevor Greenway

Francine Costa in front of the land that will soon be the home of Cohabitat Wakefield. The land is rocky and heavily forested, and

it will take much work to clear it and make it buildable, but the group is determined.

"We have a feasibility study

that just got out in January this year," added Chatelain. "The goal of having a feasibility study was to first of all demonstrate

that affordable housing was absolutely an issue. It is an issue across Canada, but there's no rental here at all."

She isn't wrong. According to the Association Provinciale Des Constructeurs D'Habitation Du Québec (APCHQ), in 2023, there was a shortfall of 15,000 rental

*"The question that we all ask ourselves as we age is, 'Where am I going to end up?'"*

— Louise Chatelain

units in Quebec. That number has likely risen over the past two years, especially with the Quebec rental board setting the 2025 rent increase to 5.9 per cent, the highest it has been in three decades.

Locally, the stats are even more dire. A 2021 report by La Table de développement social des Collines-de-l'Outaouais (TDSCO) shows a significant divide between homeowners and those who rent in the region, where 31.6 per cent of renters in the MRC des Collines spend more than 30 per cent of their income on housing, while just 13 per cent

# At Home in the Hills

## LEAP TOWARD HOUSING PROJECT

of those who own their homes spend as much on their homes. Of the 835 residents surveyed, most identified a lack of housing diversity, a lack of affordable housing and housing conditions as the top three issues facing the region.

The report also found that more than 3,000 residents, or 15 per cent of the MRC des Collines

feasibility study to approach “the big funders” in the hopes of getting the entire project 100 per cent funded through CMHC’s Co-op Housing Development Program, which received a \$1.5 billion boost from the 2022 and 2023 Fall Economic Statements.

If successful, the project could receive top-to-bottom funding from the federal government and, if all goes according to plan, be built within the next two years.

While the housing project may be a drop in the bucket in the global housing crisis, the projected 41 units built in Wakefield will make a difference locally.

The shared space will boast private dwellings for multi-generational families—single moms and dads, elderly folks, young families, and everyone in between. The project will also include shared recreational and kitchen spaces to encourage neighbourly connections among residents.

“Of course, we need our own space, but we also need a place to connect with people,” said Chatelaine. She added that the exterior space will be landscaped with lit pathways and common areas to increase the frequency of “spontaneous encounters.”

“Often when you leave your house, you don’t see your neighbours; you just come out of your driveway there, and that’s it,” added Chatelaine. “But by having these pathways, we will connect with each other to have spontaneous encounters.”

Mayor Guillaume Lamoureux said that his council is fully behind Cohabitat and added that the group has received nearly \$30,000 in grants from the municipality’s green fund.

“It’s important because it’s one of the ways the housing shortage can be addressed in La Pêche,” said Lamoureux.

“Council welcomes any opportunities to work with organizations like Cohabitat Wakefield or the Office de l’habitation de l’Outaouais.”

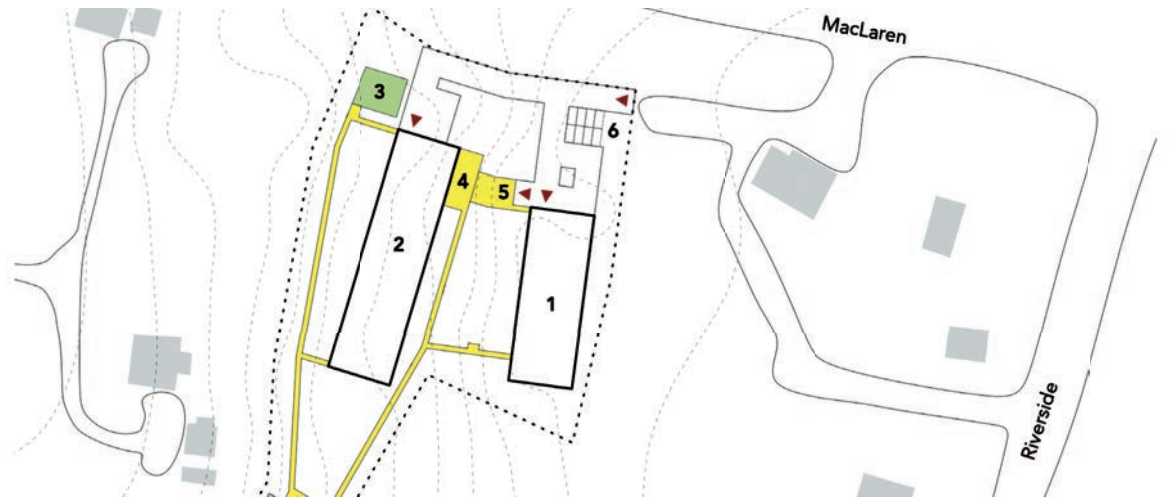
*“We have a feasibility study that just got out in January this year. The goal of having a feasibility study was to first of all demonstrate that affordable housing was absolutely an issue. It is an issue across Canada, but there’s no rental here at all.”*

– Louise Chatelaine

population, are spending more than 30 per cent of their income on housing – the 30 per cent benchmark set by the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) as “affordable.”

“It’s a universal need and when you realize it’s not being met by so many people – think about older folks that have been here forever, and they are alone in a big house – they are forced to move out; they can’t stay here anymore, and they really lose that connection to where they grew up and where they raised their family,” added Costa. “The question that we all ask ourselves as we age is, ‘Where am I going to end up? What do I want to do with this part of my life?’ And you know, a lot of the co-founders are already in their, I would say, 60s.”

The group will now use this



This concept sketch was used to show La Pêche council what a cooperative housing project could look like. However, this is not the official design of Cohabitat’s project. That rendering will come later.  
Image: Courtesy Cohabitat Wakefield