



Letters to the Editor

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS!
Letting our readers have a say.

PLEASE SEND YOUR LETTERS TO: general@lowdownonline.com Must be 450 words or less and letters may be edited for length and clarity. Please include your name, location and email address.

Home is more than a house

The Editor,

Our obnoxiously persistent housing crisis is a problem that's bigger than shelter for folks. Years ago, I wrote a doctoral dissertation on houses, homes and sustainability. It'll bore you to tears. Here's the theory in a nutshell: Homes have people in them and how people inhabit homes is more important than how houses are built. Took me four years to come up with that nugget. Pro-found, yes? Allow me to expand.

The words "house" and "home" are linked but different. The construction of a house is the beginning of a home's life-cycle, environmental and social impacts. Think about energy use and renos, then flip the sustainability coin and consider growing risks from floods and fire. Even in a house built to the highest green standards, what happens after the builders are gone has long-term consequences for people and the planet.

For example, homes are where we learn foundational lessons about how to interact with our world and it's where we acquire the basics of language and culture. Home is where we learn (or don't learn) to respect ourselves, our neighbours and our environment. And it's not a static thing: homes are complicated hybrids of people, roofs, walls and exchanges of energy and ideas that are constantly evolving. For better or worse, home is a social and ecological process.

That process is complicated by moving. Uprooting people makes it hard to maintain employment, pay attention to politics or participate in community. Moving disrupts social networks, which is especially hard on low-income folks and their kids. For poor families, there are also health impacts from substandard living conditions and the resulting stress. And because Wakefield is expensive, some people will drive until they find rent they can afford, although then they're paying for commuting. Here's another uncomfortable fact: the folks who work in stores and pubs and those who create the art and music that make Wakefield so vibrant can't afford to live in the village. This sucks.

On the other hand, it's easy to link affordable homes to a prosperous and resilient local economy. There's no question that secure, sustainable rental homes will result in better health, employment and educational outcomes. Secure homes keep seniors out of the hospital and families from getting scattered. Building smart, affordable housing creates jobs while enabling workers and families to stay, build community and invest in their future. And affordable housing for local creative types will help them maintain the vibe that makes our region so desirable which, in turn, elevates property values for everyone.

That's why I'm volunteering with a smart group of housing activists called Cohabitat Wakefield to help build new affordable, cooperative, rental housing in Wakefield. The co-op model means people living in the buildings will have a say in how the apartments are managed and will join a resilient, collaborative social network. We're planning green construction, garden space and common areas inside and out for people to get to know their neighbours.

We need community support to prove to the powers-that-be that we and our community are serious about houses and homes. Please come to our AGM and hear about our remarkable progress this past year. Sully Gardens, Thursday, Nov. 6, 7 p.m. See you there!

Gary Martin
Wakefield, QC