

Community Focus Bulletin: ***Creating Community Conversations***



Prepared by Merriam & Associates

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Housing Survey, 2016 – prepared and released by the Housing Supply Committee of the Affordable Housing Action Committee (AHAC)

(To view the complete document go to www.peterborough.ca/ahac and go to file <http://www.peterborough.ca/Assets/City+Assets/Housing/Documents/Reports/2016+AHAC+Housing+Peceptions+Survey+Summary+document.pdf>)

In 2016 a survey was developed by the Housing Supply Committee of the Affordable Housing Action Committee (AHAC). The goals were:

1. To learn the public's attitudes about housing and its relationship to quality of life
2. To start a community dialogue about the role that housing plays in individual participation in the community
3. To investigate the public perception of the relationship between housing and economy

In total, 626 respondents answered the survey and provided their perceptions of the impact that housing has on one's quality of life as well as how important housing is seen to be to the local economy.

Here are some of the findings:

The survey responses suggested that "affordability" of housing held the most significance in day-to-day living. **95.5% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that quality of life was determined by the proportion of income required to keep them housed.** Clarifying this, respondents stated that housing cost had an impact on the condition of their health (93.9%) and their ability to purchase healthy food (95.2%).

90.9% agreed with the statement that children have more difficulty achieving at school in situations where their family housing is neither affordable nor safe. 87 per cent agreed with the statement that their ability to participate in the community was determined by housing costs.

Here are highlights of the main themes developed through the survey analysis:

1. Theme: Affordability

Voices: *“As a single mom of two kids I work two jobs to pay for our lives. My rent costs me one whole paycheque every month. It’s frustrating to pay my rent. I have to work more but if I work more my kids have more time alone and I’m not eligible for most funding because I make too much. Two years ago we were homeless for seven months. Although I reached out to every community program, I was eligible for no help. It was not an easy thing to live through but we made it. I did not feel supported at all*

Survey respondents emphasized that **housing costs were fundamental in overall living deficiency**. Put another way, since housing was the largest cost among all necessities of living, it was principally responsible for the **inability to consume, live healthy lives, and participate in society**.

Comments alluded to the **barriers to safe, affordable housing**. While inadequate income was a universal barrier, other obstacles included:

- insufficient availability of units (i.e. low vacancy rates),
- lack of rent-gear-to-income units,
- long wait times for social housing,
- lack of accommodations with provision for special needs,
- poor condition of units,
- high energy costs,
- unavailability of rent subsidies,
- emergency funds depletion
- lack of personal supports.

Participants in the survey recommended to:

Improve Supply of “Affordable” Units; (“affordable” = paying no more than 30% of total income)

- build more “social housing” (i.e. rent-gear-to-income units)
- build more units “affordable” to accommodate all incomes less than \$30,000 annually
- build more “affordable” long-term care facilities

Protect Low-Income Households from Energy Insecurity

- create formula to identify low-income households
- design energy programs that subsidize low-income households

2. Theme: Supportive Housing

Voices: *“Persons with declining health or simply age-related limitations do not have the “stay at home” affordable support they need in order to do so. The Government promotes/proposes that staying at home is the best option because there is a shortage of hospital beds and assisted living accommodations, and yet where are the supports to make to make this happen?”*

Participants in the survey recommended to:

Build more supportive housing

- Develop supportive housing units to meet needs in the community that vary from people with mental health issues, physical accessibility requirements, age-related issues.
- Provide supportive housing for people with severe mental health addictions (including 24/7 supports, rent supplements)
- Create sufficient social housing for young individuals (18-30 years) with disabilities and create sufficient accessible housing for all people with disabilities.
- Develop legislative requirement for accessible model homes in new subdivisions.
- provide sufficient social housing for individuals with mental illness and/or brain injuries, and ensure accommodation is available for the 'hard to serve' segment of this population

Continuum of supported housing options needed

- Supply enough long-term care beds for moderate and low-income non-senior individuals with complex care needs which may result from brain injuries and/or progressive terminal disease.
- Supply adequate number of long-term care beds for moderate and low income seniors
- Provide sufficient home-care assistance for non-senior and senior individuals to allow them to remain in the home as long as possible before having to re-locate to a long-term care home.
- Increase housing and supports for people with mental health challenges
- Develop supportive housing in safe neighborhoods

3. Theme: Quality of Life

Voices: “Have mixed housing in one apt. building or in block of houses - better to mix people of all incomes so that people don't look down on you because you live in assisted housing. And people do look down on you. I have been waiting over one year for supported (social) housing and so I do not have money to eat or pay bills most of the time. This is very stressful and contributes to depression and anxiety.

Comments and reflections included (the need for) safe neighbourhoods, landlord ethics and housing standards, and the effects of housing costs on low-income renters. Peterborough's cost of living is a consistent theme throughout the survey comments with respondents describing numerous ways that this affects their quality of life. With these results a strong argument in favour of housing supplements can be made from both the perspective of allowing low-income earners the choice of seeking better quality/safer housing, as well as how easing the cost burden can improve their quality of life.

Participants in the survey recommended to:

- Create “affordability” using expanded rent subsidy programs (“affordability” = not spending more than 30% of household income on housing costs)

- Regulate landlords into property standards compliance

4. Theme: Mental Health

Voices: *“Need more housing in accessible locations within the city. Dealing with mental health issues and only being able to afford to live in squalor has serious effects on a person’s ability to manage their disability positively. Being restricted to ghettoized neighbourhoods where crime rates, violence and poverty abound, isn’t fair to an individual already struggling. It’s disgusting. It’s inhumane.”*

Participants in the survey recommended to:

- Expand current mental health supports available in the community so that they are more accessible.
- Increase the availability of supportive housing for individuals with mental health challenges.

5. Theme: Seniors

Voices: *“As the family structure is changing, I think it’s also important to include supports for single seniors or those who are without family to provide assistance and supports in aging. Those people may be essentially healthy, and have sufficient funds to stay in their own home or to pay for lodging in a seniors’ residence. But the community supports also must be there to enable them to continue with transportation, food access and preparation, and other home help. At the present time I don’t think there are sufficient resources of this type available in our community.”*

Participants in the survey recommended to:

Build a complete community that:

- Allows people to age in place.
- Is less reliant on cars as the main mode of transportation and creates alternative transportation options.
- provides support for more community gardens/urban agriculture
- increases the choices of accessible housing - financially and physically
Locate housing in proximity to schools, stores (grocery and other) and transportation.
- Ensure housing is accessible to:
 - public transportation
 - safe public green spaces
- affordable groceries and shopping for basic needs (food, clothing)
- Plan community neighbourhoods where people can obtain services within walking distance of their homes – support the concept of community hubs.

- Create walkable communities where all can easily access services including food and health care
- Include & encourage services within subdivisions over a certain # of households such as a local variety store within a walking distance for essentials.

Improve transit/transportation:

- provide subsidized housing near bus routes
- create transit options that are speedy and close to housing in all neighbourhoods

6. Theme: Housing Standards

Voices: *“Landlords need to be required to keep up the quality of their rental units including safety-related items like appliances, air quality and stairs - need a more effective way for issues to be identified by renters including support for the reporting process.”*

Participants in the survey recommended to:

Improve Apartment Condition to Health, Safe Standards through:

- greater enforcement of “standards” by City
- enhancement of apartment inspection process
- landlords to be accountable to City for apartment condition

Next Steps: A consultation process is underway whereby the survey results will be shared with the public, planning tables and community change agents. The intent is to get more people involved in the housing dialogue. Discussions will focus on the following questions:

1. Identify significant housing-related needs in Peterborough. (This can be based on your knowledge and experience or from the Survey Results.)
2. Based on your feedback for #1 above, what is required to overcome the significant needs you cited?
3. What would be necessary to achieve the requirements you cited in #2 above? (This could include actions by the community, the municipal governments, the non-profit sector, etc.)
4. What can you or your organization do to address this situation ?

If you wish more information on the survey and the consultation process please contact:

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For more information about our upcoming Community Focus Bulletins go to

<http://www.merriam-associates.com/contact-us>

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