Older Adults Deserve Choices: A Call for Municipal Action on Alternatives to Institutional Care

Dear Mayor and Members of Council,

Congratulations on your election or re-election to municipal office. I hope that, following the demands of the recent election campaign, you have had an opportunity to settle into your new responsibilities.

I am writing to ask that you make the needs, rights, and well-being of older adults a priority during your term of office. In particular, I urge you to take meaningful action to expand access to residential alternatives to institutional long-term care and to support older adults who wish to remain in their own homes and communities as they age.

We need a fundamental shift in how we think about and plan for seniors' care.

Growing older should not mean losing one's home, independence, community connections, or control over one's daily life. Yet, for far too many older adults, the absence of appropriate and affordable assisted housing support leaves institutional placement appearing to be the only available option when their care needs increase.

This is neither inevitable nor acceptable.

Older adults need a range of choices, including enhanced in-home assistance, supportive housing, shared living arrangements, community-based residential options like assisted living apartments with integrated PACE Wellness Hubs, small, fully staffed homes operated in partnership with local non-profit organizations and funded by Ontario Health at Home, and other models that provide appropriate levels of care without requiring people to surrender their independence and familiar surroundings.

There is growing recognition that simply building more long-term care beds cannot solve the challenges facing older adults and their families. The November 9 Globe and Mail editorial, **"More long-term care beds aren't a blanket solution to seniors' care,"** reinforced the importance of investing in in-home care and community-based housing alternatives.

This is an important opportunity for municipalities to exercise leadership rather than waiting for other levels of government to address the problem.

While health care and long-term care funding involve provincial and federal responsibilities, municipalities have an essential role in community planning, affordable, accessible housing, land use, partnerships, advocacy, and ensuring that local development responds to the needs of an aging population.

I am therefore asking Council to consider the following concrete actions:

1. **Establish a municipal seniors' housing and care planning initiative** involving older adults, caregivers, community organizations, housing providers, and other relevant stakeholders to identify local needs and develop practical solutions.
2. **Explore and support alternative housing models** that allow older adults to age in their communities, including assisted living apartments with integrated PACE Wellness Hubs, co-operative and shared housing, and small (up top 6 per home) non-profit, neighbourhood based homes.
3. **Identify municipal properties, partnerships, and planning opportunities** that could help make affordable, accessible seniors' housing and supportive living arrangements possible.
4. **Advocate to provincial and federal governments** for funding and policy changes that support non-institutional models of care, including the use of available federal housing and infrastructure funding.
5. **Include older adults meaningfully in municipal decision-making**, ensuring that those directly affected have a voice in shaping the housing and support services that will determine their futures.

Seniors for Social Action Ontario (SSAO), a completely volunteer-based organization, has developed valuable information about alternative models of housing and care, as well as examples of initiatives already operating in different communities.

I encourage you and your colleagues to explore its resources under the Editorial, Advocacy, and Research and Policy tabs at: https://www.seniorsactionontario.com/ and its recorded Zoom sessions by experts at https://www.youtube.com/@seniorsactionontario

The question before us is not whether older adults will need increasing levels of support as they age. Many will. The question is whether we will provide that support in ways that respect their dignity, autonomy, preferences, and right to remain connected to their communities.

Institutional care should not be the default destination simply because community-based residential alternatives have not been developed or adequately funded.

Municipalities have an opportunity to help change this reality. We cannot afford to keep postponing the conversation while older adults and their families struggle to find appropriate supportive housing with integrated care.

I would welcome an opportunity to hear how Council intends to advance this issue during its term of office. Specifically, I ask that you consider placing the development of residential alternatives to institutional care on a Council agenda and identify a process and timeline for moving this work forward.

Older adults have contributed enormously to the communities in which we live. They deserve more than a promise of care when they can no longer manage independently. They deserve real choices, appropriate support, and the ability to age with dignity in the places they call home.

I urge you to make this a priority and to turn your expressions of support during the election campaign into meaningful action.

Thank you for your attention and for your commitment to building a community where older adults can continue to live with dignity, choice, and independence.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]
[Your Community / Organization, if applicable]
[Contact Information]