

Mayor Marolyn Morrison ? Town looking at obtaining Age-Friendly Community status



This week, the Caledon Seniors Advisory Committee (CSAC) received a presentation recommending that the Town pursue Age-Friendly Community status under the guidelines of the World Health Organization.

CSAC established a small sub-committee after I asked whether or not Caledon should seek age-friendly standing. The sub-committee was made up of three enthusiastic and experienced members of CSAC who rose to the challenge and returned with their recommendations in less than six months. The sub-committee reviewed the current literature, met with communities in Ontario that are similar to Caledon, examined the resources required to undertake the process and made the recommendation to CSAC that Caledon establish a Steering Committee to create community engagement in the process.

Creating an Age-friendly Community is an ongoing, long-term process. Based on the experience of other communities, the sub-committee recommended that this must be a community-driven effort with active, meaningful participation from seniors across Caledon. The Steering Committee will also benefit from the participation of representatives of community agencies (health, community services, recreation, planning and the Town) who will provide the broadest range of expertise, experience and input to the process.

The Sub-Committee proposed key guiding principles to assist the Steering committee, these are: (i) respect and support for all citizens; an age-friendly community recognizes that all citizens are vital members of the community, (ii) access and inclusion for all; an age-friendly community responds to the needs of all citizens ensuring fair access to resources, supports and spaces. Services and resources for older adults must be flexible and respond to the changing needs of older adults, (iii) community engagement in decision making; an age-friendly community values the participation of older adults in all aspects of decision making and program development, (iv) livability; an age-friendly community promotes the values of 'livable communities' which encourage meaningful engagement and social inclusion, and finally (v) accountability; we are all accountable for facilitating meaningful engagement and listening and responding to the needs and interests of all citizens including older adults.

There are many advantages to building an age-friendly future for Caledon. A community that pursues age-friendly principles promotes aging in place for its residents certainly, but the benefits of an age-friendly community will serve all residents. In fact, building an age-friendly future is a foundation for universal design for all segments of the population from youth, to seniors to adults and families. It is, in my opinion, a holistic approach to community building.

This will be an ongoing process. The future Steering Committee will undertake a community assessment to identify 'gaps' and develop strategies to meet those identified needs. But it will not be a one-shot deal - the process of evaluating, monitoring and responding to the dynamic nature of our community's needs will continue for many years to come.

I want to thank the members of the CSAC Sub Committee - Carol Kidd, Bob Crease and Doug Ackers - for their time, effort and ongoing commitment to creating a better future for seniors and indeed all residents of Caledon.