

Region looking to address aging population

By Bill Rea

The population is aging, and there's considerable enthusiasm for Peel Region's efforts to get ready for it.

Part of the review process of the Regional Official Plan includes coming up with plans for an age-friendly community. The review is reflected in Regional Official Plan Amendment (ROPA) 27, which is aimed at age-friendly planning and the creation of a healthy built environment.

The region recently hosted an open house to offer information on the proposed ROPA?27.

Regional staff stated a complete community is one that provides residents with opportunities to interact, learn, work, play and live throughout a lifetime; options for housing, employment, healthy food, services and recreation; and convenient access to public transportation, with options for safe, non-motorized travel.

Staff added such a community meets the basic daily needs of most people, and within walking distance.

The push for age-friendly communities has been prompted by a couple of factors, including the fact the population is aging, and the need to plan for changes in the built environment to address the needs of these older people. It's also based on direction from Regional council as a term of council priority.

There's also an understanding that as seniors retire from the workforce, the number of younger people entering it is dropping. Staff stated that in 1991, there were 11 people in the workforce for every senior. In 2041, it's anticipated that number will be down to just three.

Looking ahead, it's expected there will be almost 415,000 seniors living in Peel by 2041, or roughly three times the current seniors' population. The proposed policies are in line with efforts to encourage municipalities to come up with policies that support seniors aging in place, encourage the use of universal accessibility design in the built environment, require municipalities to use a healthy development framework and work with municipalities to find gaps in support services and the built environment.

Addressing built environment issues, staff pointed out how people live and move about has an effect on their health. Reliance on cars when planning communities over the years have reduced physical activity in the lives of many people. It's expected that without some intervention, threat of diabetes in Peel will increase to one out of six people by 2025, which will increase health care costs.

There is also air pollution caused by motor vehicles which results in hospitalizations and premature deaths.

The proposed policies to support the healthy development framework include requiring health assessments of planning applications, as well as health assessments of all municipally operated and owned building and space applications.

They are also aimed at assuring the results of these assessments are reported to local councils and integrating the framework into local municipal policies and plans.

Staff reported key elements that influence health in the framework include densities, proximity to transit and services, the land use mix, street connectivity, parking, aesthetics, and road network and sidewalk characteristics.

?We've got an aging population and we've got to look out for them,? Councillor Barb Shaughnessy commented. ?We haven't done a very good job so far.?

Adrian Smith, manager of policy development with the Region, said he had heard no negative comments about the process so far..

He added they are working with the development industry and gathering feedback to coordinate the work with other elements in the process.

?I think the healthy development framework has been well thought out,? Mayor Allan Thompson commented. ?We've got to figure out how to make it work with the Town of Caledon.?