

Age-friendly Peterborough better for everyone

MICHELLE COLLINS and SARAH CULLINGHAM/Guest Columnists
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The audience listen to comments from Glenn Miller, senior associate with the Canadian Urban Institute and author of 'No Place to Grow Old: How Canadian Suburbs Can Become More Age-friendly', Margaret Denton, vice president of the Hamilton Council on Aging and Elizabeth Russell, assistant professor at Trent University and Faculty Fellow with the Trent Centre for Aging & Society moderated by Carol Kelsey, Dean of the School of Health and Wellness of Fleming College, during the Peterborough Age-friendly Communities Forum held at Fleming College's Kawartha Trades and Technology Centre on Friday June 23, 2017 in Peterborough, Ont. CLIFFORD SKARSTEDT/PETERBOROUGH EXAMINER/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

As we reimagine our city during the current rewrite of our Official Plan, here's

something to consider:

It's now clear that the same outdated post-Second-World-War-style of city planning -- car-dependent suburbs -- that has become too expensive for us to maintain, also risks isolating and harming our sizeable aging population.

This is the message from a new study, *No Place to Grow Old: How Canadian Suburbs Can Become Age-Friendly*, authored by Glenn Miller, fellow of the Canadian Institute of Planners and published by the Institute for Research on Public Policy. "The motivation to improve the way that cities are designed and built is largely the need to make better use of scarce infrastructure dollars, and a desire to create more vibrant communities," Miller writes. "But public health officials have added their voices to the chorus."

Since Peterborough is home to Canada's largest aging population, planning an age-friendly community must be more than just a small consideration in our current Official Plan Review.

About 20 per cent of our region's population is over 65, and in the next twenty years residents over age 90 will reach more than 4,000 individuals. Ontario government figures show more than 40 per cent of people in Toronto's car-dependent suburbs won't have a driver's licence by 2036, by choice or by being unable to drive. Plus, cars can be expensive to maintain for people on limited incomes. Yet across our region, active transportation infrastructure (including public transit) continues to lag behind car-dominated planning, and housing choices remain severely limited. In part, this raises the question of where our city's spending priorities need to be.

On June 23, the Peterborough Council on Aging launched their action plan for an Age-Friendly Peterborough with strategies for improving our region's transportation, housing, outdoor spaces, buildings, and more.

"The prospect of aging alone in single detached houses in neighbourhoods when you are no longer able to drive is not pleasant," remarked Glenn Miller, speaking at the launch of Peterborough's plan. "The time to start fixing these problems is now -- and integrating Peterborough's age-friendly strategy with the land use planning process is a good place to start."

So what does an Age-Friendly Peterborough look like? It looks like the more cost-effective and compact planning many cities are embracing.

It includes a built form where people of all ages can walk, cycle or take transit to stores, entertainment, recreation, and health care -- rather than being geographically separated from their community services and dependent on vehicles. The Plan includes a strategic

direction to diversify the types of housing in Peterborough's residential areas to include accessory units, garden homes, co-housing, and other smaller housing (like condos) so that citizens can stay in their own community as they age.

Another core direction in the Plan is to improve public and active transportation so that seniors can be mobile, active, and safe -- especially once they are no longer comfortable or able to drive. More than 60 per cent of respondents to the Age-friendly survey said transportation was a concern for them as they age, with many citing concerns about affordable transportation options.

The Plan's other directions include protecting and enhancing parks and green spaces, improving building accessibility, parking spaces for older adults, requirements for bicycle parking, and a vibrant downtown.

Developed through extensive public engagement, the Age-friendly Plan is a valuable new tool for Peterborough's urban planning. It was officially adopted by city, county, and township councils this past spring, and the time is ideal to introduce age-friendly policies throughout municipal planning.

Adapting city planning to meet the needs of our aging population can begin with Peterborough's Official Plan review. And to succeed, it will require significant political will, leadership, and wise use of resources from our community and City Hall.

This is the fifth in a series of columns from Reimagine Peterborough, a citizen-led movement that believes good urban planning is essential to our social, cultural, democratic and quality of life needs - for all ages! Join and follow us on Facebook, Twitter and reimagineptbo.ca.

The Peterborough Council on Aging is a community based collaborative organization working to improve the health, safety and well-being of older adults in the Peterborough region.

Michelle Collins is part of Reimagine Peterborough and Sarah Cullingham is the Age-Friendly Peterborough co-ordinator. For more information, visit these links:

[Age-Friendly Peterborough: Community Action Plan](#)

[No Place to Grow Old: How Canadian Suburbs Can Become Age-Friendly](#)

[Canada's Aging Population: The Municipal Role in Canada's Demographic Shift](#)