

Preparing for long term care

By Sandy Brown

The number of seniors in Canada is growing at a rapid pace and for the first time in Canadian history, seniors outnumber youth. The number of Canadians over 65 is set to increase by 25% by 2036. The majority of these seniors enjoy active living ? hiking, biking, going to community events, volunteering and shopping within the communities where they live.

Despite a desire to live at home, many seniors can face multiple health-care issues and require more complex support than family and the community can provide. The number of seniors over 80 is anticipated to double by 2036, creating further need for long-term care homes.

During a recent council meeting, I introduced a motion to reduce the development charges for building a long-term care home in Orangeville; The motion passed, with a 20% reduction for any future growth in this area.

Development charges are collected by the Town to offset any capital costs to increasing roads, Fire and Police services, transit, water or other requirements resulting from the increased need for municipal services. Ongoing costs then become part of our regular operating expenses offset by taxes.

Leaving a small footprint in terms of stress on these municipal services, the development of a long-term care, or nursing home as they are also known as, could have significant impact on our town. Beyond construction costs, homes need a variety of employees to run ? Nursing, Personal Support Workers, Physiotherapists, Administrative staff to Chef's, servers, housekeeping, groundskeepers and everything in between keep these facilities running smoothly and up to standard.

When seniors can no longer live at home, these long-term care homes offer around-the-clock nursing and personal care, support with daily activities and a safe environment for seniors to live comfortably. These are the seniors who raised us and when it comes to making the difficult decision on long-term care, I think the best options are always going to be the closest ones to home ? the ones that allows you to be there as much as possible to help when its needed.

In Ontario, the Ministry of Health and Long-term Care issues operator licenses, regulates, inspects and sets out fees for all long-term care homes. The demand for beds continues to grow and the commitment to creating and redeveloping 30,000 beds in Ontario has not been enough to meet the demands caused by the shift in demographics.

As of February 2019, the wait list for long-term beds was 34,834.

It's inevitable with this unmet demand that there will be future growth across Ontario for these facilities and the competition to attract these developers will be intense.

As we continue to live longer, we see a new family dynamic and adaptation of towns to meet the changing needs of the community and plan for future needs.

Orangeville is already an attractive area for families and active seniors, with access to trails, recreation facilities, many senior programs and supports making our area a viable alternative to city living. This is another step for Orangeville to encourage seniors to age in place and remain competitive while planning for the future.

The new Transit Task Force will also play a key role in this development. A robust public bus system complemented with ride-sharing and traditional taxi use gives families and seniors independence to continue to live in our area at every stage in their lives.

One of the largest employment industries is already healthcare, and we have a strong post-secondary educational program delivered by Georgian College. Headwaters hospital is an innovator in the delivery of integrated services and in February, the Hills of Headwaters Collaborative were notified that they were selected to make the next step towards becoming an Ontario Health Care Team.

Community leaders from a wide range of organizations, including family doctors, primary care, hospital, mental health, home and community care, mental health and patient and family advisors, are part of The Hills of Headwaters Collaborative.

Families that have cared for aging relatives can face a disruptive shift in care when the time comes to explore long-term care homes. Changing your health care team and adjusting to a new living space, especially when facing multiple and complex health situations including declining mental health and awareness can place an enormous burden on a family.

Solutions become difficult when you have to look outside of the community for long-term beds. This limits your abilities to be an active part in caring for your relatives and many younger grandchildren are left out of the solution completely as they are now unable to travel to visit Grandma or Grandpa.

These are our seniors who raised us, taught us, looked after us and supported us as we became adults and started our own lives and families. The economic benefits are clear ? there is a growing need for long-term care beds and homes as we continue to live longer lives and continue to maintain a family structure with new and evolving roles. My strong belief is when we take care of our residents, particularly our most vulnerable residents, our community grows in a positive direction that exceeds the economic benefits and creates a town we can continue to proud to call ours.

This council is listening ? reach out to myself or any member of council with your ideas!