



Affordable housing issue under spotlight

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Up here, in booming York Region, affordable housing continues to be an issue many ignore or simply don't know about, according to a group trying to change that fact.

On Sept. 13, the York Region Alliance to End Homelessness will be trying to engage the public to get involved with a special forum at the Richmond Hill United Church.

"Housing is under the radar for lots of people ... and yet it's a huge issue," said alliance public education co-ordinator, Jane Wedlock.

The goal of the forum is to involve the public and six local agencies will be there to answer your questions.

"We want to give folks a chance to listen ... but also to talk to each other," Ms Wedlock said.

York Region's director of housing services, Sylvia Patterson and Richmond Hill commissioner of planning and development, Ana Bassios, will talk about housing issues across the region and in particular, in Richmond Hill.

Ms Wedlock said many issues will be addressed, including the roles of local governments in providing affordable housing.

"It comes back to what kind of community do we want?" said Peg Hiscoke, a co-chair of the outreach committee at Richmond Hill United Church.

Ms Hiscoke lived in Richmond Hill 20 years and has been attending the church for 30, but moved north to Uxbridge as house prices squeezed her and other seniors out.

"They've been leaving the community in droves," she said.

She added that she knows many friends whose children are simply unable to buy their own houses in the area when they grow up

The result, she said, is increasing "ghettoization" and a fraying of the bonds



JANE WEDLOCK: Perception that there is enough affordable housing in York Region is wrong, she says.

that once held the community together.

"I guess maybe we've lost that caring-for-each-other thing," she said.

Ms Hiscoke said the church has been looking at poverty issues for the past several years, working with organizations like Habitat for Humanity, but wanted to take this opportunity to step forward more boldly.

There are currently nearly 5,500 people on the waiting list for social housing in York Region and Richmond Hill has the longest list of any municipality, Ms Wedlock said. Richmond Hill is also about to undertake a review of its Official Plan, presenting a unique opportunity to confront and hopefully resolve housing issues, she added.

Awareness remains one of the biggest obstacles to getting people involved.

"Our communities don't see themselves as having low income (families)," said Ms Wedlock.

But, she added, "People want to have a sense of what is going on in their community."

Ms Wedlock cited a recent study by the Pembina Institute that ranked York Region's diversity of housing placement as 27th out of 27 Ontario communities, as proof of how acute the problem is.

"We want to have communities that are welcoming," she said. "We want healthy communities for everybody."

The forum, *It's About People ... Taking Action to Increase Affordable Housing in Richmond Hill*, takes place, Sept 13, at Richmond Hill United Church, at 10201 Yonge St. Displays will open and refreshments will be available at 6:30 p.m. with the forum beginning at 7 p.m.

For more information, visit www.yraeh.ca or call 905-967-0539.