

## **Letter to Editor – Era-Banner 8<sup>th</sup> July 2007**

### **Column hit nail on head**

Jul 07, 2007

Re: Homelessness country's defining social issue, June 28.

In case residents of York Region believe this is an issue from which we are immune, we would like to point out this is far from the case.

Homelessness, hidden homelessness and risk of homelessness are realities in the region. Social service agencies responding to this crisis are struggling to keep up.

Together with poverty, the critical lack of affordable housing is a key underlying factor leading to homelessness. Lack of affordable housing was a recurring theme at the recent community consultations on long range plans for sustainability.

Housing is a fundamental building block of a healthy community.

York has the lowest proportion of rental housing in the GTA and the lowest vacancy rate. There are 5,300 households currently on the waiting list for rent geared to income housing.

The list is up to nine years or even longer for families in the south of the region; much longer than that if you are a single person.

Seniors also have a wait that is years-long.

The list does not reflect the need for affordable housing in our communities. It reflects the people who are willing to keep their name on it year after year in the hope they will get the housing they need.

Many people drop off the list or move away from the community or become part of the vast numbers who are commuting to York to work because they cannot afford to live here.

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce at its recent convention emphasized the importance of affordable housing as a "major factor in creating attractive, liveable and competitive cities".

As the population here is expected to grow by 570,000 people over the next 25 years, we are going to need a concerted effort by all levels of government, the private sector and the broader community to build communities that reflect these socio-economic realities.

As the column so rightly stated, it is going to take courage, ethical purpose and strong leadership to make the change. As citizens, let us also be part of that change process.

Richmond Hill United Church and the York Region Alliance to End Homelessness are co-hosting a public forum on Homelessness and Affordable Housing issues at Richmond Hill United Church, 10201 Yonge St. Sept. 13 from 7 to 9.30 p.m. All are welcome.

Jane Wedlock  
York Region Alliance to End Homelessness