

District Services Board creates senior priority waiting list for all rental units

by **Alicia McCutcheon**

MANITOULIN—In a push to create more seniors' housing and through its commitment to the 10-year Housing and Homelessness Plan in the Sudbury-Manitoulin area, the Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board passed a motion at its last meeting to give seniors top priority on all DSB housing unit wait lists.

Currently, the DSB recognizes victims of family violence as a priority group on the waiting list, and will continue to do so, the board learned.

Donna Moroso, director of integrated social services with the DSB, explained to the board that the DSB can set priority groups, such as was done for victims of family violence.

"This puts seniors as a priority group on all the buildings we own," Fern Dominelli, DSB CAO, explained. "This will allow seniors to go to the top of the waiting list. We will have problems with the other people on the list, but we will deal with them through other programs and services."

This move was decided following a recent meeting with the Municipality of French River, which asked if this could be done. After some staff research, it was agreed that it could in fact be done and the motions put in place to see it happen.

"When reviewing the needs of our communities, it is important to mention that within the current application process, there is not a vehicle embedded that enables a true measurement of need," Ms. Moroso explained. "In communities where senior-only housing is offered, the same applicants are often on both waiting lists (senior-only and integrated). Given the proportionate amount of turnover within age-integrated buildings, many seniors find themselves utilizing DSB-owned units as transitional units until senior designated housing becomes available."

Ms. Moroso continued, noting that tenants are required to be capable of maintaining independent living in their units, but may do so with any required supports (VON, CNIB, Meals on Wheels, etc.) so long as they are in place.

"Senior residents typically thrive when in an environment that is geared towards older adults and most wish to remain in hometowns or villages where family is present," Ms. Moroso said. "Many senior residents do not smoke, do not have pets and maintain their units to above reasonable standards."

On the topic of smoking, this was another concern raised by French River, Mr. Dominelli said. The DSB will be surveying the DSB units' residents to see how many are smokers.

"Isn't that discriminatory?" asked Central Manitoulin Councillor Derek Stephens.

"I thought so too," Mr. Dominelli responded, "but if there's a building that would like to go smoke free as a pilot project, we could look into it."

In Little Current's Channelview Apartments (which was recently designated as seniors only), 70 percent of its cur-

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rent residents are senior citizens, as is 45 percent of the waiting list. Manitowaning's Bayview Apartments has a 32 percent senior population, with no seniors on the waiting list.

In Mindemoya's Meadowview Apartments, 25 percent of its residents are seniors, with 46 percent of the waiting list senior citizens while in Gore Bay, 23 percent of the makeup of Bayside Apartments are senior citizens, 43 percent on the waiting list. Gore Bay's Woods Lane Apartments has a senior vacancy rate of 34 percent with 43 percent senior citizens on the waiting list.

The motion to create a senior priority housing policy was passed by the DSB.