

# DSSAB study: more senior housing needed

By CAMILLA  
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Special to the Monitor

A lack of senior housing and an increased need for supports to allow seniors

to remain in their own homes were the top issues to stem from a Manitoulin-Sudbury District Social Services Administration Board housing study.

The Manitoulin-Sudbury Housing Needs, Supply, and Affordability Study was presented to the board at their September meeting.

Edward Starr of SHS Consulting said his company was commissioned to identify the major most urgent housing needs across the DSSAB jurisdiction and provide some ideas on how the DSSAB could help meet those needs.

"The biggest issues that arose was the growth in senior citizen population and seeing that a lot of these seniors have very limited incomes. They also need a bit of home support in order to be able to keep living in their homes."

The report suggests how the DSSAB "could be using some of the provincial government economic stimulus money that's out there to expand the supply of senior citizen housing and it also recommends the DSSAB work more closely with the Northeast Local Health Integration Network which has some dollars under a program called Aging at Home Strategy to help seniors get the support they need."

Starr said the document also lays out a number of ideas to expand the supply of senior housing and housing for people with disabilities.

Board chair, Ray Chenier describes the report as important "because it addresses not only the need of housing as such for disabled people and senior citizens, it also talks about the services that these people need and I think that more and more we'll be faced with that."

He added, "Looking at the population aging as fast as it is, it may not be always possible to provide public housing for senior citizens, but we should be able to provide services to senior citizens who will choose to stay in their homes rather than go to institutions or wherever."

The study also makes recommendations regarding the physical state of social housing buildings in the board's service mandate.

"When the province transferred social housing over to the DSSAB about 10 years ago, there was a lot of need to repair of these units and the report gives ideas on how to carry out these repairs and upgrade their own social housing stock es-

pecially to make it more energy efficient and to make it more accessible to seniors," said Starr.

He explained his firm was also asked to look at the supply of social housing the DSSAB operates all across the entire mandate area and see whether it matches the demand or need in each area.

"We found, for example, some areas of Manitoulin or Sudbury East, didn't even have any supply of social housing for families whereas other areas had an oversupply. We suggested that there be an expansion of social housing for families in Manitoulin and Sudbury East. Actually a conversion particularly in the north in the Chapleau area is of some family units they're having difficulty keeping full because there's not enough demand and they should be converted for seniors or single people where there is a lot of demand."

According to Starr, the final part of the report discusses the DSSAB's role in helping to promote changes in regulations and advocate for more ongoing programs across the area that depend on provincial or federal funds. It lays out a role for the DSSAB to be able to be effective in lobbying and advocating and working with other municipalities and DSSAB's to get try to get their fair share for the area.

And, how does the Manitoulin-Sudbury region compare to the rest of the province?

"Most parts of Ontario are seeing an increase in the need for senior citizen housing - that's pretty consistent," said Starr.

What sets the region apart he said, is that the overall population isn't growing, "In fact some forecasts say it's going to decline so we're not looking at an area where we're coping with a lot of growth, it's more an area of changing characteristics of the population - more seniors and more people with disabilities and how to adapt your housing so it can meet those changing demographic and needs in the area."

Starr said in southern Ontario, "It's an issue of how many houses must be built to keep up with the population boom but here it's careful planning because it's more of a stable population."

The North must also contend with the issue of remote communities and limited resources, he added.

"We tried to carve out ideas for the communities that have a lot of underutilized older buildings - to perhaps adapt an existing building and provide housing."

David Court, Interim Acting CAO for the board, said the DSSAB will have to work its way through each of the rec-

ommendations to determine, "which ones we are moving ahead on."

The study can be viewed in its entirety on the board's website: [www.msdsb.net](http://www.msdsb.net) by going to the administration information section and clicking on issue reports.

The Manitoulin-Sudbury DSSAB covers 45,000 square kilometres and is comprised of representatives from 19 member municipalities and unorganized townships within the districts of Manitoulin and Sudbury. It does not include the City of Greater Sudbury.

DSSAB is responsible for coordination and delivery of services divested by the province to municipalities including Ontario Works, social housing, emergency medical services (land ambulance,) early learning and child care services.

## New name for social services board

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The Manitoulin Sudbury District Social Services Administration Board will soon be

known as the Manitoulin Sudbury District Services Board.

Chair Ray Chenier said he's been on the board since it originated in 1999. "At that time, we were truly a social services administration board but then social housing was downloaded onto the board, then emergency medical services were also downloaded to the board, so we're way beyond a social services administration board.

"We are really providing services directly so I think the name change is important to truly describe who we are," he added.

At the September meeting, the board agreed to the new name which will take effect once the legalities of the name change are finalized. It is not known how long that will take.