

Accessibility of senior housing units needs to be addressed: DSSAB CAO

Tom Sasvari
The Recorder

ESPANOLA—More senior housing units and more supports to allow seniors to stay in their own homes longer in the future, were the two main highlights released in a Manitoulin-Sudbury District Social Services Administration Board (DSSAB) housing study recently. However, the interim CAO of the local DSSAB feels that the major issue that needs to be addressed in the short term is the accessibility and shape of the current seniors housing structures in the area.

“We received a series of

recommendations made in the report, and things for staff to do to report to the board at its November meeting,” David Court told the Recorder on Tuesday. “The recommendations were based on looking at the next 25 years, and the need for more seniors housing only gets there in the future, some time over the next 25 years. And we will have to look at the short-falls.”

However, “one thing that the board will have to start looking at shortly is the existing buildings we have and how accessible they are,” said Mr. Court. “For instance, we already have senior units that are two-storey, including all four housing units on Manitoulin (in Gore Bay, Little Current, Mindemoya, Manitowaning) and as the average of the tenants in

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these buildings increases, the need is to look at making the units more accessible. This can be very expensive, as much as \$250,000 to \$350,000 per unit to make them more accessible. This is the sort of thing we will have to be focussing on, and some of the recommendations involve the public sector, which we don't have any control on.”

“To be fair, people used to enter these type of senior housing units when they were younger, and now it has been found people are moving into these units at a later age,” said Mr. Court. “We can see a trend where the average age of a person entering one of the senior

housing units is increasing, and it is harder for them to move around, so something like elevators are going to be needed to make them more accessible.”

“The problem is the cost; there is lots of provincial one-time Affordable Housing Program funding, but this funding program runs out in March 2011,” continued Mr. Court. “My recommendation to the board will be to look at the state of our current buildings, and making them more accessible before there is further construction of new buildings.”

As evidence of what Mr. Court feels is the short-term priority, one of the recom-

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...Sr. housing needs attention

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mendations in the study, carried out by Edward Starr of SHS Consulting, is on the upgrading of existing housing stock.

“The DSSAB should continue to seek funding to undertake a process of defining, formulating, and implementing a work plan for improving accessibility of its existing social housing portfolio,” said Mr. Starr in the report. “This will allow them to strategically plan out the changes required so that funding and other resources may be pulled together appropriately on an ongoing basis. It can then be ensured that the portfolio will be updated in accordance with new accessibility regulations by the year 2025. Of particular importance are enabling barrier-free access to all units and providing eleva-

tors in two storey buildings wherever possible.”

Editor's Note: See next week's Recorder for the second part of this story.