

# Committee to explore affordable housing options for Killaloe area

By Johanna Zomers

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

**Killaloe** – A steering committee to explore the next steps to bring affordable housing for all ages to the community was the outcome of a meeting last week attended by about 40 people.

Eleven people, including municipal representatives, agreed to sit on the steering committee following the May 25 meeting at the Lions Hall.

Organizer Ish Theilheimer said he hopes the final outcome will be affordable housing for a variety of people and families that is sustainable, energy efficient and in line with the community needs and beliefs.

“This will not be a short-term thing,” he said. “The very successful Fairfields’ project in Eganville took 10 years of hard work, but it was worth it. People in the housing field tell me to expect this kind of time frame.”

Mr. Theilheimer, founder of Stone Fence Theatre and a resident of North Algona Wilberforce (NAW) Township, said he thought there was the potential to get something regional going in Killaloe with local projects to meet the specific needs all over the county.

“There are some influential people in this room with a real track record of accomplishment,” he said. “So, I’m optimistic but also daunted by the work ahead.”

“But many successful community projects have had their beginnings in this hall.”

Many in attendance spoke about how affordable housing keeps people living in the area.

“We build community by building housing,” NAW resident Kathy Eisner said.

While a housing shortage is often perceived as the very visible homelessness seen on city streets, in the Ottawa Valley the shortage of affordable housing affects working and middle-class families who can no longer afford to rent, buy or build homes.

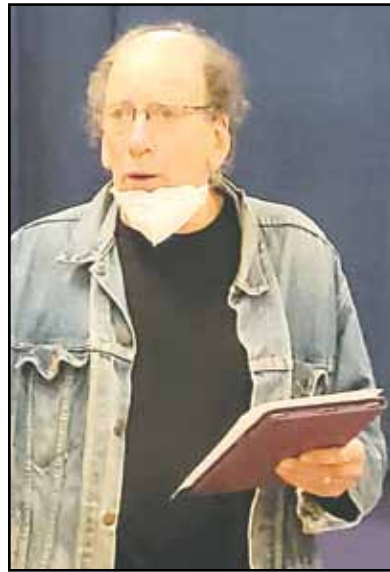
The accepted official definition of affordable housing is housing which takes up no more than 30 percent

of your income. When the costs are higher, other necessities suffer. It translates into a multitude of other economic disadvantages. The current labour shortage is partly the result of the housing shortage. Without a place to live, young people cannot stay in the Valley.

Several factors, including the influx of newcomers during COVID-19, has affected the supply of available homes both for sale and rent.

“We need to think of housing as an economic entity,” local realtor Pam Ogelsby said, adding the accepted realtor practice of ‘blind bidding’ which artificially raises house prices, should be banned.

“Our children will never be able to afford to buy a house here,” added Killaloe, Hagarty and Richards (KHR) councillor Ted Browne.



Ish Theilheimer



About 40 people attended a public meeting in Killaloe last Wednesday night to discuss the need for affordable housing in the community for all age groups. It was organized by local community activist Ish Theilheimer, shown above addressing the gathering. *Photos: Chris Neff*

There was a general consensus that all levels of government need to be involved in creating the sort of mixed housing that works for young families, seniors, for the sort of mixed age diverse groups that are a natural part of community. Both KHR Mayor Janice Tiedje and Sue Klatt, CAO of Madawaska Valley Township, commented on the unfair downloading of housing onto the individual municipalities.

“Municipalities cannot solve this problem on their own,” Mayor Tiedje, former chair of the Renfrew County Housing Board, said.

NAW Township is currently conducting a Needs Assessment of the housing situation in the area. Some of the questions acknowledge the insecurity of housing for many people which includes fear of having to move and

ability to pay bills into the foreseeable future. The current revision of the planning process and land use designations on the county level will open some solutions, mostly in terms of housing density. Infill housing (i.e., housing that fits within an existing neighbourhood) and ‘granny suites’ can provide additional housing on existing lots but there are a number of limiting factors. Some counties have created funding to help homeowners create additional housing on their properties, but Renfrew County is not one of them.

Killaloe resident and retired businessman Dan Harrington cited a time when the village had more than a dozen properties available for rent.

“They are no longer rentals,” he noted.

As chair of the local food bank, he

said he sees the connections between unaffordable housing and food insecurity.

The current labour shortage, which seriously affects local employers, is also partly an outgrowth of the lack of available and affordable housing.

“We need to attract immigrants to make up for the children we are no longer having,” Round Lake resident Judy Martin said.

Currently, the federal government has money available for affordable housing projects, though there are many steps necessary to get to the point of being ‘shovel-ready’. CMHC -- the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation -- also has grant and loan funding programs available to help get a co-operative project off the ground, but sources of local capital is also needed.

The issue of the lack of affordable and attainable housing was also discussed at the Renfrew County council meeting earlier in the day in Pembroke. In her address, Warden Debbie Robinson noted how during a recent session of the Eastern Ontario Wardens’ Caucus (EOWC) in Pembroke, Mayor Robin Jones, chair of the Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA), made a presentation on the subject.

“Housing is a priority across this province and certainly for the County of Renfrew,” Warden Robinson stated. “And lobbying by AMO (Association of Municipalities of Ontario), ROMA (Rural Ontario Municipalities of Ontario), the Western Ontario Wardens’ Caucus (WOWC) and the Eastern Ontario Wardens’ Caucus (EOWC) is continuing in earnest in preparation of the delegation meeting at the AMO conference this August.”

Warden Robinson said while the EOWC has three priorities, it is currently focusing its energies on housing.

“We are preparing to offer insight to the newly-elected provincial government regarding the housing needs of eastern Ontario, as well as potential solutions,” she explained.