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## Wakefield housing co-op clears another hurdle

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A housing cooperative in Wakefield has been granted a 25-year property tax exemption, bringing it one step closer to creating affordable housing in the village.

A tie-breaking vote by

council on April 7 gave Cohabitat Wakefield the exemption, allowing it to apply for funding required to build an affordable and environmentally sustainable 41-unit housing cooperative in Wakefield.

According to Cohabitat Wakefield board member and

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 8**

Continued from Page 1

# Mayor breaks tie to approve housing coop

grant writer Gary Martin, council's decision to grant the tax exemption is "huge for [Cohabitat Wakefield]."

"Added to the promise of the land, the municipal commitment to our project adds up to around \$2 million of a \$17-million project."

Prior to council's decision, Martin had expressed concern that if the tax exemption wasn't granted soon, Cohabitat Wakefield could lose the opportunity for critical government funding.

"Timing is critical," he had told the Low Down.

In order to apply for government grants, Cohabitat Wakefield needed a guarantee from the municipality that it will receive 25 years of property tax credits – essentially an exemption from paying these taxes.

Cohabitat Wakefield asked for this exemption from the municipality in February this year. In response, council mandated municipal staff to draft a bylaw that would set parameters for municipal support to affordable housing projects.

Council's decision, however, to grant the exemption nearly didn't pass.



Cohabitat Wakefield volunteers Louise Chatelain and Francine Costa pose at the future site of their housing coop. Photo: Low Down file

The new bylaw that would grant the non-profit a 25-year tax credit was finalized the same day as the April 7 council meeting. The resolution to adopt it was therefore added to the meeting's agenda at the last minute, according to La Pêche Mayor Guillaume Lamoureux.

This caused consternation for some La Pêche councillors, including Ward 3 Coun. Pierre

LeBel.

At the meeting, LeBel voted against the resolution, saying, "I do not have enough information to make an informed decision." He added, "Although I understand this is an emergency, I feel uncomfortable [voting in favour]" of the resolution.

LeBel pointed to Quebec regulation that states councillors should have 72 hours to consider

documentation related to a resolution before a council meeting. Article 148 of the Municipal Code of Quebec states that: "Any documents useful in making decisions must, barring exceptional situations, be available to the members of the council not later than 72 hours before the time set for the beginning of the sitting."

Ward 1 Coun. Yan Bernier and Ward 2 Coun. Daniel Meunier concurred with LeBel's statements and also voted against the resolution.

Ward 4 Coun. Pamela Ross, Ward 5 (Wakefield) Coun. Shaughn MacArthur and Ward 6 Coun. Benoit Hudon voted in favour of the resolution. It was a tie, which required Mayor Lamoureux to decide the outcome.

"I understand the concern of my colleagues," Lamoureux said.

Before voting in favour of the resolution, he added: "It's important to understand that additional delays ... [could] jeopardize the group's chance of obtaining funding."

In a statement to the Low Down after the meeting, Lamoureux said that Cohabitat Wakefield has "a beautiful project that would be a great addition to the community, and we really need

to diversify housing in La Pêche."

He added: "Council needed to confirm its support without further delay to maximize their chance of being ready when the funding program is launched, which some suspect could be this spring."

## Co-op's next hurdle

Last year Cohabitat Wakefield secured 2.5 acres of land behind the fire station in the village, which was transferred by the municipality of La Pêche.

Martin pointed out that the cooperative doesn't yet own the land – it has only been promised it by the municipality – and the tax exemption will only apply once there are buildings there. But the municipality's promise "is equity we can now use to apply for funding for development studies ... and construction funding. "The development studies will cost around \$150,000 and must happen first. That's our next hurdle," Martin continued. "We will also seek funding from local businesses and the public."