

Co-op housing coming to Chelsea and Wakefield?

The Editor,

Canadians are facing a three-legged monster: a housing, health, and environmental crisis. Co-op housing, while not a solution on its own, offers inclusive and affordable housing solutions that also address health and environmental priorities. Co-op living can provide sustainable shelter that builds on community energy.

With rising house rent and purchase prices, young people, seniors, struggling artists, and those providing front-line services in our community are especially finding it hard to secure a home.

If you live in a housing co-op, your rent will likely be lower than in a privately owned apartment. Instead of holding a mortgage to buy a condo or townhome, you buy a share in a non-profit housing corporation and pay a monthly housing fee. Those living in a co-op are its members and manage their building.

High-density "green" co-ops offer communal living and are, by design, socially and environmentally friendly – unlike what is typically offered by private developers.

Housing co-ops cost less to operate – about 14 per cent less

than municipal or private non-profit housing, according to a Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) study. Across Canada, over 2,200 non-profit housing co-ops are home to about a quarter of a million Canadians. Quebec has the most. More than 50 per cent of all of Canada's housing co-ops are in La Belle Province. Rather than wait for private developers, municipalities can be proactive in supporting new co-op housing projects. Quebec has consciously provided the legal means for municipalities to secure privately-owned land (at fair value). This means co-ops can be built in good locations despite a shrinking land base and dominance by fast-moving, for-profit land developers.

The federal government has acknowledged the key role of co-op housing. The new \$1.5 billion Co-operative Housing Development Program, announced in this spring's federal budget, will support 6,000 new co-op homes.

The Fédération inter-coopérative en habitation de l'Outaouais (FIHAB) is a local group of nearly thirty successful housing co-operatives. It is ready and able to provide guidance, working models, and technical support.

When interviewed at his office in Hull, Raphaël Dery, the General Director of FIHAB, explained that "by prioritizing greener housing co-ops, we reduce costs, risks, and ecological footprint while creating healthier communities for our members, and neighbours."

Can 2023 be the year that Chelsea and Wakefield fully commit to co-op housing? Chelsea's municipal council recently announced its intention to purchase land near Farm Point. In Wakefield, the municipal council is looking to secure a parcel of NCC land and has provided \$30,000 in funding to Cohabitat Wakefield (<https://cohabitat-wakefield.ca>). Incorporated in 2017 as a non-profit cooperative, Cohabitat Wakefield, led by seven co-founders, is determined to build the first affordable green housing co-ops in the village of Wakefield.

Tell your councillor that you want to see your tax dollar supporting viable co-op housing projects. Become a supporting member of Cohabitat Wakefield. Or help create a new community group to start planning a cooperative housing project in Chelsea.

Robert Vandenberg
Chelsea, QC

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Send your letters to general@lowdownonline.com
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Chelsea mayor not keeping his word

The Editor,

When the new Chelsea municipal council was sworn in, one of the first orders of business was to set in abeyance the contentious dock policy of the previous council – a move that current dock owners widely supported. We had hoped it was a sign of a desire for consultation and compromise, as promised by the mayor in his "whistle-stop" speech in Farm Point when he was running for election.

On Dec. 6, during the Chelsea council meeting, various residents reminded him of his promise to meet with residents affected by the intended removal or municipalization of road community docks. One would have hoped that Mr. Guénard would have taken pride in keeping his word, but no. Instead, the mayor made it clear that he had no intention of fulfilling his commitment.

What a missed opportunity. The vast majority of dock owners, including Farm Point residents, support increased access to the Gatineau River for Chelseites and the public and agreed that the municipality should create two access points with significant parking capacity and a few soft access points along the Voie Verte.

In an effort to further increase river access and reduce the overall number of private docks, Ward 5 Coun. Rita Jain, whose ward is host to most of the docks at issue, proposed that residents of river-adjacent

roads could apply for one private dock permit per road, thus consolidating river access. Yet, only councillors Labrie and Valente voted for the amendment. Councillor Wilson was absent. Councillors Chan and Blais voted against it, giving several rationales, such as difficulties related to implementation and the need to reappropriate these docks from Ward 5 residents to provide access to residents outside the ward. Mayor Guénard did not have to vote but chose to create a tie, which killed the amendment.

Given the lack of public consultation and refusal of council to meet and explore solutions and compromises, it is difficult to understand why new public access points to the river cannot coexist with road community docks that have provided peaceful river access for decades to over 300-400 residents living within walking distance from the river. In particular when those docks that are an essential part of the Ward 5 residents' social fabric and cohesion and offer an option that aligns with the municipality's objectives to provide increased and safe access to the shoreline of the Gatineau River; to contribute to residents' quality of life while not amounting to an excessive occupation of the municipality's banks and shoreline.

Christina Bock
Barbara Shaw
Mailin Boppe
Chelsea, QC

Cohens are 'superior beings'

The Editor,

Anybody that knows these shifty characters, Phil and Glennis Cohen, had better read between the lines. They play it cool while pulling off all kinds of scams, like starting the library and forming groups of activists that caused the new community centre to be built, giving money to make it happen by donating

profits from the sale of their Farm and the profits from the sale of their garage sale. Hosting summer parties, giving free boat rides, and coming up with that fun-filled Dragon Fest creation. Donating endless hours visiting and comforting people who were in various tough situations. Running around in a chicken tea cozy hat while creating a Village Poet. Starting the wakefield

internet, volunteering for endless groups and committees, and sharing their time with anyone who asks. There is no way they should ask people to get involved after setting such a high bar that would be impossible to follow. So be warned, these two are superior beings

Randolph McMillan
Wakefield, QC

Letters to the Editor

The Low Down invites letters, which must be limited to 450 words. Include name, street and e-mail address. Letters may be edited for length and clarity. Send submissions via email to: general@lowdownonline.com



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