



# At home in the Hills

REAL ESTATE & MORE

## Cooperative housing group gets

*Cohabitat Wakefield is one step closer to building affordable homes*

By Stuart Benson

The construction of affordable, multigenerational and environmentally-sustainable cooperative housing is one-step closer to being realized in Wakefield.

Thanks to a financial contribution of \$15,000 from La Pêche municipal Green Fund on Sept. 5, Cohabitat Wakefield said it

is reaching its goal of building these kinds of homes in the village.

“The big push right now is fundraising and the best way to start was with the Green Fund,” said Louise Chatelain, a Wakefield resident and one of the seven co-founders of Cohabitat Wakefield. “Even though we don’t have land yet, there’s a lot of work that needs to be done in pre-development to get to that point.”

*“Wakefield is becoming really attractive to a lot of people to move here, which is adding more pressure for local artists, young families, seniors and vulnerable populations that are being pushed out of the area for cheaper rent.”*

– Cohabitat Wakefield co-founder Louise Chatelain

Cohabitat Wakefield launched as a group in 2015 and comprises seven founding members including: Chatelain, Arleen Prost, Lenny Prost, Jacques Rousseau, Diane Ville-mure, Pat Cummings and Francine Costa.

The group’s vision is to create a vibrant and cohesive



(From left) Francine Costa, Arleen Prost, Lenny Prost, Diane Ville-mure, Jacques Rousseau, Pat Cummings, and Louise Chatelain are the seven founding members of Cohabitat Wakefield.

Photo courtesy of Louise Chatelain

community of approximately 30 housing units that would be affordable and environmentally-sustainable. In April 2017, Cohabitat Wakefield was incorporated as a non-profit solidarity cooperative, meaning future tenants will collectively act as the owners of the real estate.

“Wakefield is becoming really attractive to a lot of people to move here, which is adding more pressure for local artists, young families, seniors and vulnerable populations that are being pushed out of the area for cheaper rent,” explained Chatelain. “The pandemic has also shown us that food security is a huge issue, so we really want

to look at sustainable ways to provide food for the community year-long.”

Cohabitat Wakefield states that it believes that the cooperative model is the best one to accomplish both of those goals, especially the aspect of affordability, which Cohabitat Wakefield and The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation defines as: when a household spends less than 30 per cent of their before-tax income on shelter costs. According to 2016 Census data, the average income for residents in the MRC des Collines was \$36,779, putting “affordable housing” costs at \$919 per month for the average

JOHN ZEITOUN - CABINETMAKER

cabinet

• WAKEFIELD •  
.ca

john@cabinetwakefield.ca  
(819) 459-2477

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## boost from La Pêche Green Fund

resident.

Since its creation in 2015, Cohabitat Wakefield has been busy forging partnerships with the Regroupement des OSBL d'habitation et d'hébergement avec support communautaire en Outaouais and the Coopérative de développement régional Outaouais-Laurentides, who are helping the group to apply for funding from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, develop their business plan and create internal documents for their future members.

As of now, Cohabitat Wakefield has over 50 "support members," many of whom are residents of Wakefield with an interest in actually living in the cooperative once it has been

built.

"We can't have full-fledged members until we have buildings," Chatelain explained, adding that they managed to grow their numbers mostly through word of mouth and very little media attention, with a few exceptions. "There's so much support for this because there is a need."

### 'Housing is more than a roof over one's head'

Andrea Smith, one of Cohabitat Wakefield's "support members," moved to the

*"Housing is home and community, and the current, mainstream model of housing reinforces isolation and independence ... Anyone who rents in Wakefield has a stake in this."*

— Andrea Smith

village in 2017 from Nova Scotia where she had been living in cooperative housing for the previous 10 years.

"I learned about Cohabitat Wakefield two years ago from an article in The Low Down," Smith explained. "I loved the community and the affordability of the co-op housing model."

Smith likened her past experience with the cooperative housing model to a general insurance policy for a community and everyone living in it.

"If I didn't have a tool or an emergency happened, there were people I could depend on," Smith explained. "[My partner and I] have a young kid, so it's always nice to know there are other adults [around]."

Smith said her experience with Cohabitat Wakefield has been about "empathizing with one another's interdependence,"

and building relationships of respect and reliance in the community. She added that recently, due to the conditions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of building community and having neighbours who are there for one another is more apparent than ever.

"Housing is more than a roof over one's head; housing is home and community, and the current, mainstream model of housing reinforces isolation and independence," Smith said. "Anyone who rents in Wakefield has a stake in this."

If you are interested in supporting Cohabitat Wakefield or would like more information, you can contact the group at [welcome@cohabitatwakefield.ca](mailto:welcome@cohabitatwakefield.ca).