

YORK REGION: **GETTING**
BETTER with **AGE**

ENABLING SENIORS to ACTIVELY and SAFELY AGE in THEIR HOMES

MAY 2019





York Region: Getting Better with Age

Supporting age-friendly complete communities is a focus of the *York Region Seniors Strategy*. Seniors need housing options and communities that help them remain independent.

Having access to affordable, safe housing suitable to a senior's stage of life is necessary. A senior may need to decide whether to stay in their current home or move to a more senior-friendly housing option.

In some cases, especially as mobility issues arise, a senior may decide to upgrade their existing home and incorporate more accessible options to support their activities of daily living. In other cases, a senior may choose to move to another home; one that is closer to services and amenities located in a complete community or to move to a home where they share living space with others, such as in a co-housing or co-ownership situation. Complete communities allow people of all ages and abilities, including seniors, to live, work and play within their community. To support this work York Region has developed *Shaping the Future, Building Complete Communities in York Region*, a document outlining the key features within a complete community.

In order to begin to understand how to create more senior friendly housing options, this paper will explore built form adaptations; specifically looking at two conventional built form frameworks - Universal Design and Flex Housing - along with examples of Homesharing, and Cohousing.

Advocates stress that incorporating built form adaptations into the design of new developments is more cost effective than renovating existing buildings.



Built form adaptations create more senior-friendly housing and allow aging in place

- › York Region’s population is increasingly made up of seniors
- › Most seniors prefer to age in place – that is, to stay in their own home or community of their choice for as long as they are able

York Region seniors prefer to age in place, but in order to do so they must be supported by accessible environments and a variety of senior-friendly housing options

- › Through community consultations, York Region seniors have told us they want to stay in communities they are familiar with, close to family and friends
- › Falls, which can threaten seniors’ safety and independence, are the leading cause of fatal and non-fatal injuries among older adults
- › Seniors need a variety of senior-friendly housing options -- including rental, affordable retirement homes, secondary suites and congregate living -- located within easy access to services and amenities

Built form adaptations are design features that improve accessibility and make housing options more senior-friendly

- › Built form adaptations can include:
 - › Types of buildings (such as dwellings, places of worship or meeting houses)
 - › Specific elements of buildings (such as doors, windows, roofs, walls, floors and chimneys)
 - › Spatial sections of buildings (such as the size, function, arrangement or connection of rooms)

Universal design is a set of broad principles that allow municipalities to come up with design features that increase accessibility

- › **Universal design** was recently adopted in the **Town of Caledon** as part of their Official Plan. In order to receive approval from the municipality, developers of new subdivisions must include at least one floor plan model that incorporates universal design features.
- › Some approved universal design features include:
 - › **Exterior features** such as a flush threshold (no step) main entrance and lift options in the garage to ensure accessible access to the dwelling
 - › **Main floor living features**, such as a main floor master bedroom and bathroom for people who may have trouble navigating stairs
 - › **Wider hallways and doors** to accommodate someone who uses a walker or wheelchair
 - › **Counters of varying heights** in the kitchen, to allow older residents to cook comfortably from a seated position
 - › **Toggle switches and higher plug placements** to make the lighting and ventilation systems more accessible
 - › **Roughed-in areas** where a residential lift or elevator can be installed
- › In addition, builders in Caledon must display the universal design option in their sales office, along with a list of all the universal design features that are available. This will let potential homebuyers see what options are available to them at an extra cost, while allowing sales agents to direct older buyers to the options that could be of most benefit to them.

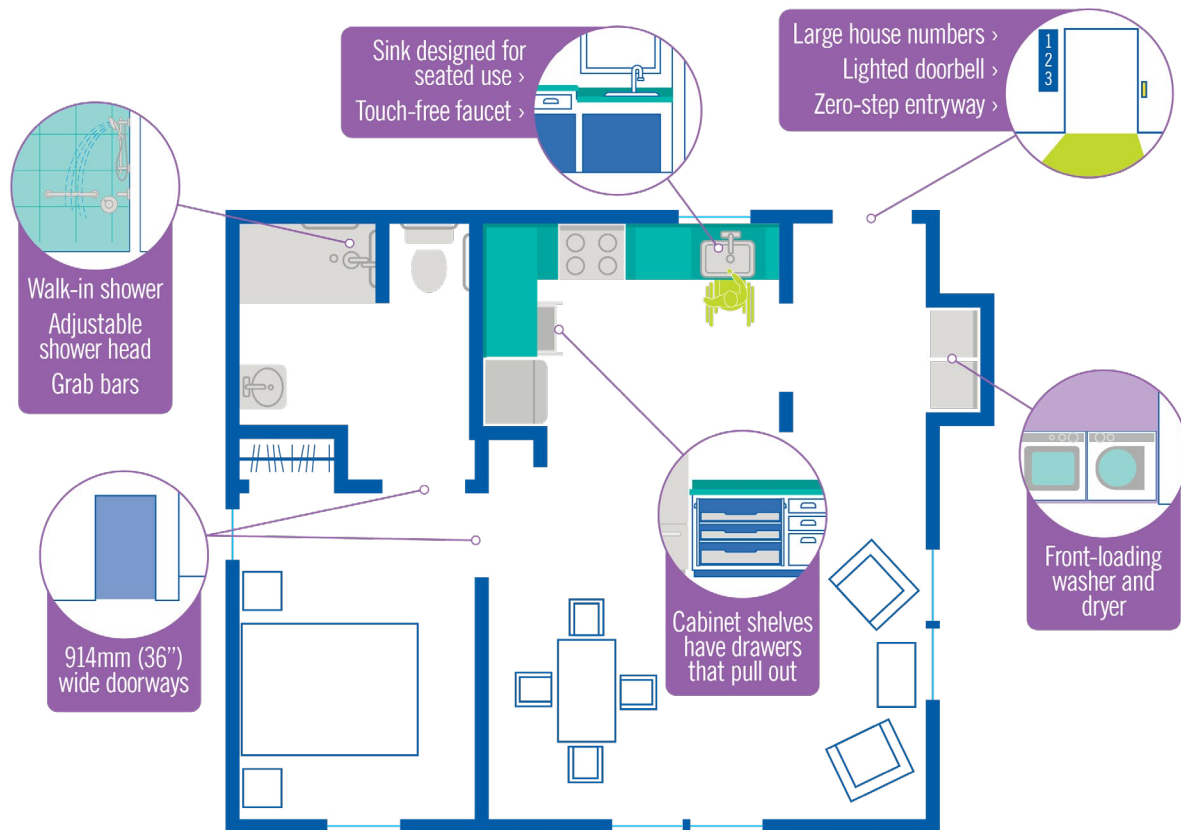
Flex Housing provides opportunities to retrofit housing as individuals age, catering to residents of all ages and abilities

- › Flex Housing is easily modified to meet specific needs rather than relying on custom designs.
- › To ensure a dwelling can meet a broad range of individual needs over time, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) has developed a **checklist of features** that should be incorporated into a home at the time of construction, such as:
 - › Reinforced bathroom walls to support grab bars
 - › Stairs that accommodate the installation of a stairclimbing mechanism
 - › Home wiring that is compatible with home automation systems
- › In 2009, British Columbia approved **Adaptable Housing principles** in the British Columbia Building Code.
 - › These principles were developed to guide local municipalities when creating their own bylaws and building plans.

Innovative options like Homesharing and Cohousing (including Co-ownership), can also help seniors to age in place

- › **Homesharing** is a viable housing alternative for those who want to remain in their home and are willing to share common living, dining, kitchen, office and laundry spaces with others.

Figure 1 - An example of a Universal Design floor plan



› **Homesharing's** purpose is twofold:

- › To help older people to remain at home with independence and dignity, while fostering intergenerational/interpersonal understanding
- › To offer home seekers additional affordable housing options

› In March 2019 Toronto City Council agreed to fund, the **Toronto HomeShare Program**. The program was developed by City staff and the non-profit National Initiative for the Care of the Elderly (NICE).

› The program matches older adults (55+) who have a spare room in their home with students who are looking for affordable housing.

› In exchange for reduced rent, the students agree to contribute five to seven hours per week to the household.

This time could be spent preparing and sharing meals, doing light housework, running errands or walking a pet.

› **Cohousing** integrates the use of community spaces to promote active aging and helps reduce the feeling of isolation that may be experienced in institutionalized care.

› Residents usually own their individual homes, which are clustered around a "common house" that has shared amenities like a kitchen and dining room, children's playroom, workshops, guest rooms, home office, arts and crafts area, laundry and more.



- › Each home is self-sufficient with a complete kitchen, but resident-cooked dinners are often available at the common house for those who wish to participate.
- › Across Canada, **14 different cohousing communities** have been completed, and 11 more are in development or construction. Most of these are in British Columbia.
- › Another type of cohousing **involving the co-ownership of single units by multiple seniors** has also been developed.
 - › While less structured than cohousing communities, co-ownership offers seniors opportunity different way to remain healthy, active and connected to others while aging in place

When thinking about where to live, remember both the community and the type of home will have a significant impact on quality of life especially as you age.

Have your say to shape the future of York Region, visit york.ca/mcrgetinvolved to complete our community survey or follow us on social media with **#YRHaveYourSay**

