

# **Supporting Aging in Place in Terrace Bay**

**Final Report Addendum**

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## **Addendum: Supporting Aging in Place in Terrace Bay**

We conducted informal follow-up interviews three years later to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the community and the challenges seniors face in continuing to age in place during and after the pandemic. Following up on our previous report, "Aging in Place in Terrace Bay," we aimed to explore what changes had occurred since the original report from 2021 from the perspectives of various community members. One significant change we noticed was that although the community desires a senior's housing complex within the community, seniors are becoming more open to alternative housing models that reflect the available support services. The community must take action to find tradespeople and housekeeping services to meet the community's needs and especially for seniors that desire to remain in their homes. Below, we discuss the progress on the categories of recommendations and processes made since the final report's release. These include:

### ***Health Status Recommendations***

The release of the initial report has opened conversations within the community to consider the future and plan for getting older. The community should further explore the recommended action to review documents and planning resources from the Government of Canada. Education through the seniors' centre to discuss an advanced care plan with family members is encouraged. However, securing funding for programming was not successful for a grant.

### ***Health Care and Home Care Recommendations***

Access to specialists, mental health support, efforts to retain human health resources, and PSW support continue to cause difficulty in the community. In particular, home care challenges from PSW support require recruitment efforts to retain staff. Scholarship opportunities for students to train in the community as medical professionals with guaranteed jobs upon completing schooling are encouraged.

Currently, the Ontario government is offering programs for PSW, paramedic, RPN, RN and nurse practitioner training. The community should look at options to support community members to take these programs, particularly since grants will cover the cost of tuition and other expenses.

Communication between healthcare providers and the township is encouraged to ensure the two groups regularly discuss the activities, needs, and challenges. Conversations about assisted living, home care, and future government funding and planning are underway and have increased since the initial report.

### ***Housing and Home***

The gaps related to housing and homes continue to challenge seniors wanting to remain in their homes. Seniors are not moving because they need to be closer to specialists; they leave because they can no longer maintain their homes. The community has experienced volunteer burnout and must find ways to encourage businesses that focus on home services such as cleaning, cooking, maintaining a yard, walkways and light home maintenance. In addition, home maintenance services continue to be unavailable. The shortage of contractors continues to be a significant gap and has made it difficult to retrofit homes with stairs and accessibility issues.

Those who desire to stay in their own homes can benefit from the recommendation of purchasing inventory homes appropriate for accessibility needs. The option has been discussed with community members at the senior's centre and provided an opportunity to share current mobility challenges in the home. Creating partnerships with renovating companies and contractors in Thunder Bay to complete a list of jobs has been encouraged. Additional ideas, such as a monthly "labour" day for home maintenance repairs and creating a list of individuals' needs for home maintenance and community members willing to do the work, continue to be recommended. There is a need for more house cleaning services, and external recruitment from the community is encouraged. Scholarship opportunities to apprentice in the trades or general home contracting with guaranteed jobs upon graduation have yet to be successful in the community. Recruitment for an "aging in place" coordinator is ongoing. Maintaining the Meals on Wheels program has been successful. Additional support is required for action on suggestions such as congregate meals for socially isolated seniors and creating a community kitchen and cooking program.

### ***Housing Options***

During the initial report, seniors were reluctant to move into senior housing as they did not believe they could sell their homes. The housing market has since improved, allowing seniors to sell their homes to families looking to upgrade to larger homes. Seniors recognize that staying in their homes is a short-term option, given the gaps due to lacking resources and labour in the community. However, most seniors remain in place as there is a need for more options in the community for housing. The Township of Terrace Bay has acquired the local church to retrofit the building into a seniors' building and has followed the recommendation to begin with a small number of apartments.

Participants at the Senior's Centre appeared more open to discussing non-traditional housing arrangements, admitting they have other limited choices. Initial discussions to consider inventory homes, hiring an aging-in-place coordinator to assist with community services, and exploring options of public/private partnerships to develop seniors' housing have been made. Based on discussions with the hospital administration, there was a significant turnover in staff during COVID-19 as senior staff decided to retire. The average staff age has dropped, bringing in a new generation with different financial needs and a desire for work-life balance. The younger generation has less of a desire to purchase traditional housing and would prefer renting. However, as existing rental units are at tenant capacity, this leaves limited options for renting.

## ***Transportation***

Seniors that rely on transportation require a housing complex close to the town centre. The new senior housing complex that is underway is in an ideal location within walking distance of local stores.

Recommendations for a car-pooling/ride-sharing system were also encouraged for shopping or parcel pickup. Calling friends or neighbours to ask if others need rides continues to be encouraged, as is creating a car-pool list for regular programs.

## ***Finances***

The resale value of people's homes has increased in the past three years. However, seniors have the money but want to avoid paying for another mortgage if they move to Thunder Bay. Meetings with financial planners require further action to encourage planning for the future.

## ***Connections***

Discussions at the Senior's Centre disclosed that socially isolated community members continue to exist. Assistance from an "aging in place" coordinator would support conducting a community assessment for socially isolated individuals and creating a check-in and safety system.

## ***Safety***

Stairs continue to pose a risk to seniors in their own homes. Seniors continue to have safety hazards and mobility struggles when they go downstairs to do their laundry. Introducing a laundry service that is available to seniors continues to be encouraged. A lack of contractors limits recommendations to find an installer to install chair lifts. Installing chair lifts can be included in a list of jobs from outside contractors.

## ***Supports and Services***

Recruiting housekeeping services within the community still needs to be brought in. Suggestions for housekeeping recruitment outside of the community on a rotation system require additional support outside of volunteer support.

Discussions at the Senior's Centre highlighted that the community has aged since the initial report and needs to consider their future and plan for getting older. Resources listed by the Government of Canada were part of the conversation.

## ***Community***

Participants in group discussions want to remain in the community alongside their social networks. There existed concern for those seniors who are socially isolated.

## **Recommendations**

We recommend that the township continue to apply for grant opportunities to hire an Aging in Place coordinator who can work on the above recommendations. The following recommendations are highlighted in terms of priorities:

1. Create a list of renovations, including accessibility requirements, needed in seniors' homes and work with contractors in the region to complete these renovations.
2. Conduct an inventory of homes in the community, particularly focusing on which homes are accessible or could be renovated to be accessible (e.g., limited stairs, etc).
3. Look at options to renovate the church that the town purchased.
4. Continue to stay in contact with Ontario Health NorthWest and TBDSSAB for housing opportunities.
5. Explore connections with Thunder Bay developers for assisted living housing opportunities.