

Abbotsford Seniors Housing Study

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1. Introduction

The City of Abbotsford is actively building a healthy and vibrant community for its aging population. Seniors represent one of the fastest growing age groups in Abbotsford, with 17,343 or 13.3% of the total population 65 years or older. This proportion is expected to double to 37,005 or 19.5% of the population by 2031. With the significant increase in the seniors' population in the next 20 years, Abbotsford is committed to planning for this population through transportation, community support, social participation, and housing. Housing remains a critical need for many seniors, including availability, accessibility and affordability. The City is working to develop innovative responses to housing for seniors that will allow them to age in place, in housing that meets their needs, and in neighbourhoods where services and supports are easily accessible.

The Seniors Housing Study created the opportunity to investigate what the current housing situation is and what the City of Abbotsford will require by 2031, contributing to the proposed Abbotsford Age Friendly Community Plan. Focus was placed on housing need, affordability, accessibility, visibility, as well as innovative housing types and design. This was achieved through a literature review, community consultation, case-studies, (including the Clearbrook-Mill Lake area), and the development of policy recommendations from community-based responses. The outcome of this study is to develop policies that will assist the City in leveraging funding for seniors housing, and to include the recommendations in the City of Abbotsford Zoning Bylaw, Official Community Plan, Affordable Housing Strategy, and Building Code.

2. Literature Review

Through the course of the study several housing options were investigated for their viability as seniors housing. The provision of options was developed through an extensive literature review, including FlexHousing, secondary/garden suites, greyfield mixed-use/redevelopment, pocket/micro-suites, cohousing, and visitable and adaptable housing. These options were presented to seniors in Abbotsford for review to assist in developing policy recommendations.

When investigating housing for seniors it is important to consider the range of challenges that seniors experience as they age. Research has shown that seniors prefer to age in place, to assist in making this transition more comfortable. Aging in place is the ability to live in one's own home for as long as confidently and comfortably possible. The concept eliminates the need to move out of a current residence in order to secure necessary support services in response to changing needs. Despite changing housing needs, long-term residents frequently want to stay in their neighbourhood because they are familiar with the local shops and services, have friends in the community, and want to stay near their doctors and dentists. By increasing the opportunity to remain in one's community, or age in place, seniors are provided options to continue to contribute to the community. (Government of Manitoba, 2010)

Seniors also often experience a decline in hearing, sight and mobility. Since there is a limitation in outside physical activities, seniors tend to focus more on the activities in their residences, leading to barriers in housing design. Their homes become the only places they can maintain social bonds with individuals in their community and therefore housing must fulfill their needs for daily activities. The concepts of visitable and adaptable housing, as well as multi-generational housing are presented as the first examples of appropriate housing for seniors, as they can be applied to all of the following examples.

2.1 Visitable Housing

Visitable housing promotes an independent lifestyle and is characterized by ensuring that everyone, regardless of mobility will be able to visit someone else's home, use the bathroom and exit the home. The design allows for the least mobile person to visit the homes of friends and family without the need for a great deal of aid.

According to the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies, the minimum features to ensure the goal of visitable housing is achieved are:

- A zero-step entrance at the front, back or side entrance of the house (located on an accessible route from the street) (Figure 1)
- Wider doorways on all main floor doors, minimum 32 inches clear of door opening
- A half bath on the main floor (minimum requirements include a sink, toilet and a wider doorway)



The Importance of Visability for Seniors

- Increases interaction and inclusive, livable communities
- Responds to seniors' desire to age in place
- Promotes sustainable design for changing housing need over one's lifetime and reduction in environmental and monetary costs due to home renovations when mobility changes
- Reduces stair related injuries and can reduce length of hospital visits as patients can go home because of accessibility features
- Permits more flexibility in moving furniture, carrying groceries into the home, transporting a stroller or wagon among other items
- Provides value added and can be incorporated with other building innovation such as affordable design, energy efficient housing and green design

Figure 1. A home with a zero step entrance allows seniors and those with mobility issues the ability to access with ease.

Source: pcj.typepad.com

Visitable housing designs are most common in new, single-family homes, but could easily be incorporated into most housing styles, or existing housing. Visitable housing benefits everyone, including seniors, people with disabilities, parents, children, pregnant women, people in the moving industry, people with temporary physical injuries, and anyone who has limited mobility. Visitability improves the use of a home over it and the homeowner's lifetime. This is a promising approach to creating more accessible homes, while allowing seniors to age in place. (Canadian Centre on Disability Studies, 2009)

2.2 Adaptable Housing

According to the British Columbia Building and Safety Policy Branch, adaptable housing is an approach to residential design and construction in which homes can be modified at minimal cost to meet occupants' changing needs over time. By incorporating flexibility into home design from the start, adaptable housing helps people stay in their homes through illness, injury and aging, provides more accessibility for people with disabilities, and reduces the cost of future renovations to accommodate people with disabilities.

Adaptable housing includes basic accessibility features such as corridors, doorways, bathrooms and kitchens that facilitate access for people with mobility limitations (Figure 2, 3 & 4). Design and construction features support future installation of grab bars in the bathroom. Purpose-built features are incorporated during initial construction, such as accessible positioning of electrical outlets and switches and design of door and faucet handles.



Figure 2, 3 & 4. Adaptable housing includes features such as easy to use door handles (left), wide doorways (middle), and accessible kitchens (right). Source: British Columbia Building and Safety Policy Branch

Adaptable housing not only benefits seniors but also benefits society by saving on institutionalized care costs, and by making homes more accessible for visitors with mobility limitations. Adaptable housing is a cost effective approach to facilitating independent living. The added initial construction costs are minimal compared to the costs of adding accessibility features after construction.

(British Columbia Building and Safety Policy Branch, 2007)

2.3 Multi-Generational Housing

Multi-generational housing involves shared living among residents of varying ages. Despite the growing trend of retirement communities in places such as Arizona and Florida, a 1996 survey completed by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) found that more than three-quarters of those fifty or older preferred to live among people of all ages. When asked about apartment living, almost half preferred to live in an age-integrated building. Despite some unfavourable ideas about multi-generational programs - which usually result from thoughtless siting or design that mixes quiet and noisy residents or restricts access to commercial, recreational, or service facilities - these programs have shown that mutual assistance and companionship can improve the daily lives of family members. Specific examples of multi-generational housing options are presented later in this document, and include concepts such as secondary/granny suites and cohousing. (Ahrentzen, 1999)

2.4 Secondary & Garden Suites

A secondary suite, also referred to as a basement, mother-in-law or granny suite, is a self-contained living space consisting of a bedroom, bathroom and kitchen located within or on the same property as a single family home (Figure 5) (City of Calgary, 2009). A secondary suite is considered secondary or accessory to the primary residence on the parcel. It normally has its own entrance, kitchen, bathroom and living area. Such a suite often is one of the following types:

- A suite above a rear detached garage
 - A suite above the main floor of a single-detached dwelling
 - A suite below the main floor of a single-detached dwelling (a "basement suite")
 - A suite attached to a single-detached dwelling at grade
 - A suite detached from the principal dwelling (a "garden suite" or "guesthouse")
- (City of Kelowna, 2009)



Figure 5. Self-contained secondary suites provide features such as a private entrance, own kitchen, bathroom and living area, while on the same property as a single-family home.

Source: City of Kelowna.

Benefits of Secondary and Garden Suites for Seniors

Secondary and garden suites appeal to seniors who want to age in place, as well as in less space, but wish to retain access to a garden, contact with other people, and to extended families who would like to stay together. A secondary or garden suite can be incorporated into the design of a new home, or be implemented after the home has been constructed. (City of Vancouver, 2004)

These accessory dwelling units can be an ideal form of compact living, surrounded by friends, family and services within a true neighbourhood. An owner of a large older home may elect to move into the small unit (such as after the children leave the home or at retirement) and make the principle house available to a couple or family. This might give rise to informal agreements that accommodate mutual interests such as childcare in return for home maintenance. (Hinshaw, 2002)

2.5 Cohousing

Cohousing creates neighbourhoods that combine the independence of private dwellings with the advantages of shared resources and community living (Figure 6 & 7). Residents own their own home with all amenities but share in the common areas. The shared facilities and physical design have proven to support and sustain community connection over time.

A History of Cohousing

The cohousing concept began in Denmark 40 years ago. The first communities were designed to provide multi-generational housing for people seeking a safe and supportive living environment (Mumford, 2009). Today there are 200 cohousing communities in Denmark alone with 10 percent of all new multi-family construction being cohousing. In North America there have been over 80 communities completed since 1991 and there are over 130 in various stages of development.

Cohousing as a Care Model for Seniors

A recent article in USA Today describes life in Silver Sage Village in Boulder, Colorado. Many residents at Silver Sage see the cohousing lifestyle as a viable alternative to institutional care as they age. As noted by Jim Leach, president of Wonderland Hill Development, the company behind Silver Sage, "If you house people that way [cohousing] and let them age together, they not only live longer, they live healthier and the cost of living is a lot less." Cohousing is not for everyone, but it can create a family-like atmosphere – which is especially welcome for those who do not have close relatives. (El Nasser, 2009)

Cohousing is a great opportunity to apply the concept of multi-generational housing. It allows people from all walks of life to live in a community and care for one another. Many cohousing projects believe in community as the cornerstone of healthy living. Cohousing provides an opportunity for people of diverse ages, cultures, religions and sexual orientations to live together. (El Nasser, 2009)



Figure 6 & 7. WindSong Cohousing in Langley, BC is made up of 34 townhouses. These homes are under strata title and are one, two and three bedroom units to accommodate families, seniors, and couples.
Source: WindSong Cohousing.

2.6 Pocket Housing

The pocket house model is a recent development aimed at alleviating one segment of affordable housing need. It uses scattered, narrow, infill lots, located in residential neighbourhoods. In Winnipeg, Manitoba pocket housing suites are an average size of 230 sq. ft. per unit, with rent at \$350 per month. The suites are an affordable housing model that offers a suitable alternative to rooming houses for low-income single persons, one type of housing need often overlooked in Manitoba. (CMHC Pocket Housing)

In Manitoba, each building is two stories high and has eight units each with separate entrances, private bathrooms, and separate ventilation systems (Figure 8). Each building features three barrier-free suites and one fully accessible suite on the main floor, with four other suites on the second level accessible by two outside staircases. Each suite has a built-in cooking area complete with mini-fridge, microwave, sink, hot plate, dishes and cooking utensils. Suites also feature a single bed, a built-in table and a chair. The fully accessible main floor suite has modified doorways and a large roll-in shower for wheelchairs. (Pocket Houses, 2004)

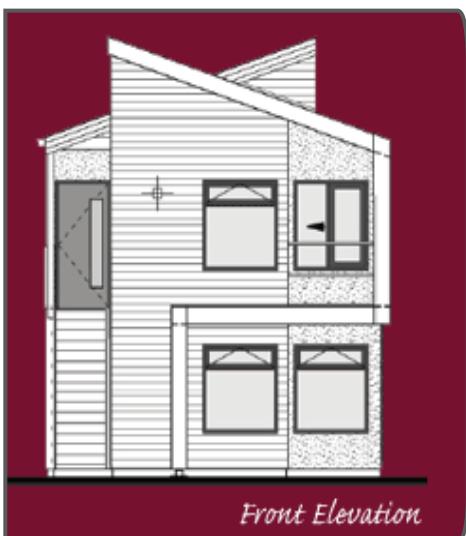


Figure 8. Pocket housing provides affordable housing, and can typically be found utilizing narrow, infill lots.

Source: www.sam.mb.ca/pockethouses/innovation.html

Suitability for Seniors

Pocket housing was developed with low-income singles in mind, as well as a solution to traditional Single Room Occupancies (SROs). The concept could also be applied to housing for seniors (low income or otherwise) if visitable and adaptable housing design techniques are incorporated into the initial design, as well as adding enough space in some units for two occupants. The building could also incorporate at least one elevator, so that residents with reduced mobility can access units on the upper floors.

These homes are typically built on infill lots in residential neighbourhoods, which could in turn give seniors a housing option within their own neighbourhoods when their single-family homes become too large, or because of reduced mobility. This concept would allow seniors to age in place, as well as maintain independence and live in their community with others. (CMHC Pocket Housing; Pocket Houses, 2004)

2.7 FlexHousing

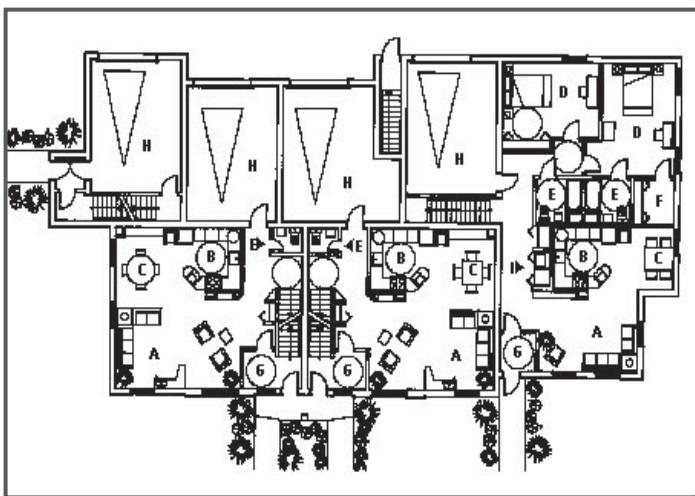
FlexHousing is a concept in housing that incorporates, at the design and construction stage, the ability to make future changes easily and with minimum expense, to meet the evolving needs of its occupants. The intention of FlexHousing is to allow homeowners to occupy a dwelling for longer periods of time, perhaps over their entire lifetimes, while adapting to changing circumstances and meeting a wide range of needs. FlexHousing allows homeowners to adapt their dwellings, instead of moving, as their circumstances change.

Most homes built in the last 50 years were designed for two-parent families with two or more children. As people age, families change and so do their needs, especially when it comes to living space. The advantages of FlexHousing are not limited to individual homeowners. By making it possible for people to remain in their homes despite changes in their lives and personal needs, the concept contributes to neighbourhood stability, fostering a sense of community among residents.

Four Principles of FlexHousing

Any home can be a FlexHouse as it is simply an approach to designing and building homes based on the principles of:

- **Adaptability** - Designing a home for a variety of possible arrangements.
- **Accessibility** - Concept is user-friendly and its features add convenience and practicality to the functions of a home.
- **Affordability** - Although the initial cost of a FlexHouse is slightly more than a conventional home, FlexHousing features recover their investment over the long-term because pre-engineered features allow for easy and inexpensive change and renovation. In addition, staying in a FlexHouse avoids the significant costs of moving.
- **Healthy Housing** - The integration of healthy building materials and innovative housing technology protects the health of the occupants and the environment. Some of these include: low-emission building materials, integrated and properly sized heating, and ventilation systems, landscaping that helps to conserve water and reduce maintenance.



A - Living Room D - Bedroom G - Vestibule
 B - Kitchen E - Bathroom H - Garage
 C - Dining Room F - Storage I - Utility Room

Figure 9. FlexHousing in Canada:

St. Jérôme House

Award of Merit, Designer: Stéphane Hazan Architectes

This FlexHouse is the ultimate in flexibility and elegance. Having the appearance of a large, carriage-trade home, the structure includes four large, garden apartments with in-law or bachelor suites. It can also be broken up into smaller units for use as a nursing home or a student residence with seven to 10 units. Three of the four units are at ground level, providing easy access for wheelchairs. In addition, all units have a garage that can be converted into living or work space. Source: http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/co/buho/fliho/fliho_013.cfm

Examples of FlexHousing options include:

- Designing an attic to allow for conversion to an apartment by roughing-in bathroom or kitchen plumbing at the time of construction.
- Reinforcing bathroom walls during construction to allow for the installation of grab bars.
- Wider than usual doorways allow for greater access, especially for a wheelchair or walker. (CMHC FlexHousing, 2009)

2.8 Greyfield Redevelopment for Mixed-Use Housing

The growing number of older commercial centres, also referred to as greyfields, present the opportunity to redevelop or revitalize shopping malls, strip malls or retail plazas. Owners of these sites are looking for alternative uses such as housing since these greyfields are composed of failed or failing retail uses and their associated parking lots.

The New Kitchener Market: A Case Study

A former City parking lot and surrounding commercial land in Kitchener, Ontario, was redeveloped into the New Kitchener Market in Kitchener's Market District (Figure 10). A collaboration between the City and a private developer, the mixed-use project includes a market building, public square, commercial space, an underground parking garage, and the 68 unit condominium development Le Mache Residential. In addition to contributing to the revitalization of the downtown, the New Kitchener Market acts as the eastern entrance to Kitchener's central business district.

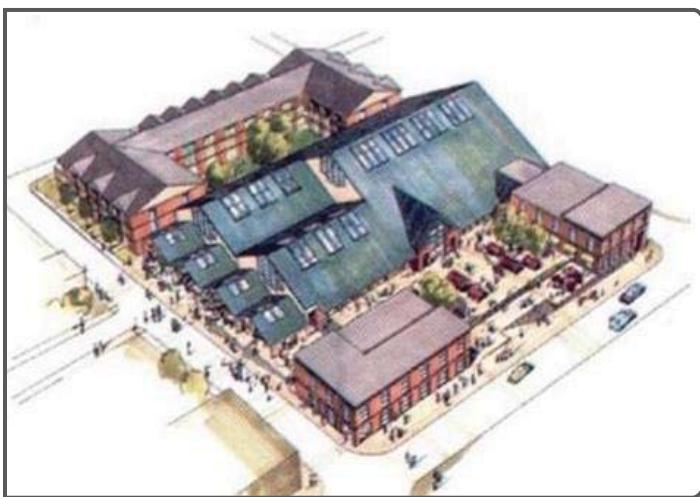


Figure 10. The New Kitchener Market project revitalized downtown through mixed-use development.

Source: CMHC.

In the pre-development stages the City, developer, and community at large believed the location of the New Kitchener Market would revitalize the downtown's Market District, and serve as the eastern gateway to the central area. The mixed-use project would enhance the "urbanization potential" of the downtown, where numerous other residential and mixed-use projects have recently been built. By offering families, singles and the elderly convenient and relatively affordable residential opportunities in the downtown, the project will benefit surrounding businesses, help stem growth outside Kitchener, contribute to the City's tax base, and make efficient use of existing infrastructure.

The New Kitchener Market meets several of the objectives outlined in the City's Downtown Strategic Plan: increasing "people activity", intensifying residential land use, and fostering local economic development. These objectives are key to realizing the City's main aim of drawing people back to the core area and making downtown a place for people to live, work and play.

Mixed-Use Housing and Seniors

The concept of mixed-use housing design is appealing to seniors living in city centres or highly urbanized areas because it allows them to maintain an independent lifestyle, as well as age in place. When constructing such homes, concepts of universal design, visitability and adaptability should be considered, so the aging portion of the population may also consider living there. These concepts also enable persons with disabilities to live in the building.

It also gives seniors the option of living above, or, in the case of the New Kitchener Market, beside retail shops and services – making shopping and errands a simple task. The ability to maintain an urban lifestyle and remain independent makes mixed-use housing a good option for seniors with even reduced mobility. (Downtown Kitchener, 2010)

2.9 Rural Seniors Housing Project

The Rural Seniors Housing Project was completed in March 2008 by the Western Rocky View Communities Development Society in Bearspaw, Alberta. The Western Rocky View Communities Development Society (CDS) spent three years planning the development of a Rural Seniors Eco-Village in the greater rural Bearspaw/Lochend area northwest of Calgary. The development was a result of many of the region's aging members leaving the community for senior's centres in Calgary because of the lack of facilities and supported housing options. Their proposal included a Rural Seniors Eco-Village that would be senior led and driven, reflecting rural values and allowing seniors to remain in their communities as they age. An extensive community consultation process was completed over a two year period with rural seniors.

The project is a non-profit affordable housing eco-village that reflects rural values and allows for independent and supported living choices. It incorporated green building principles and sustainable technologies in relation to water, power and waste management as well as agriculturally based activities. Ownership of the land would be by a non-profit corporation keeping the cost of the housing units below market value. A generous local senior offered to donate land for the facility, which has given the group a focus for further shaping of the housing concept.

Outcomes of this project were to include:

- A housing concept to be designed and built for local residents
 - For seniors aged 55+ with priority for local residents (ranchers, farmers, and other long time residents)
 - The land to be owned by a non-profit corporation to assure below market value of housing
 - A model of housing to be developed that could be replicated in other communities
 - The model will be an eco-village that uses green building principles and products, and uses sustainable technologies in relation to water and waste management
 - The concept would include independent living in cottages and supportive living in a building with apartments and a dining room or common kitchen
 - The 20 cottages would be one story units up to 1500 sq. ft.
 - A wellness centre or common building with a dining room, meeting space, exercise and recreational facilities, and a room where visiting health care professionals could attend to residents
 - Assisted living to include maintenance of the grounds and buildings, meals, light housekeeping, visiting health care professionals, and some means of transportation sharing
 - Designed in a way to encourage community interaction (meeting rooms, dining room, trails, etc.)
- (Community Futures Centre West, 2008)

2.10 Abbeyfield International/UK

Abbeyfield International is the network of societies that operate around the world who promote the Abbeyfield concept globally using its network of member national societies and, through them, an extended network of local societies. Abbeyfield International provides support, guidance, and encouragement for existing and new societies and organizations focusing on independent living for seniors linked to the local community.



Figure 11 Abbeyfield of Vancouver

Abbeyfield Houses of Vancouver Society is a registered charity that operates a home for independent seniors in the Marpole area of Vancouver. They have 18 bed-sitting rooms, common kitchen, dining, and living facilities. Meals are also offered, prepared by live-in coordinators.

Abbeyfield provides a range of services including sheltered housing and care homes. Supported sheltered houses offer rented accommodation for older people who want a supported, but independent lifestyle. Residents receive as much support from their house manager and volunteers as they require, yet are able to look after themselves in many other ways. One or two cooked meals are provided every day. Abbeyfield's care homes are specially designed and staffed to accommodate those who require 24-hour care. (Abbeyfield International, 2004; Abbeyfield Houses Society of Canada)

Abbeyfield in Canada

Bob McMullan and Arnold Edinborough founded the Canadian national society, Abbeyfield Houses Society of Canada, which was registered in 1985. At about the same time, three or four local communities were about to develop houses and became affiliated societies. There are now 40 local societies in Canada, with 29 operating houses and 11 planned or under construction. Over 20 are in British Columbia where expansion continues. There are now societies in most provinces and houses also in Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta and Nova Scotia.

2.11 Prince Edward Island Senior Citizens' Housing

Many seniors find their housing needs change over time. In some cases they find their income is less than in earlier years, making housing difficult to afford, while others may find it more difficult to maintain their own home. In recognition of these needs, the federal and PEI provincial governments provide funding for building and maintaining seniors housing projects.

There are 1,158 seniors housing units in 35 communities across PEI. Most housing units are one-bedroom apartments with a living room, kitchen, bathroom and storage area. Islanders aged 60 and older are eligible for assistance, and those who are 55 and older who have a disability are eligible to apply and will be given consideration based on the availability of seniors units. Tenants are selected based on their level of need. Staff consider applicants' income, assets, health, age, present housing and the length of time the application has been on file. Rent is 25 per cent of the tenant's income. (Prince Edward Island Department of Community Services, Seniors and Labour, 2009)

3. Observations

The 2006 Census indicated large-scale changes in the age distribution of Canada's population as a result of an aging population. Increased life expectancy allowed for the number of seniors aged 65 years and over to surpass the four million mark for the first time. As a result, the proportion of senior citizens in Canada has increased from 13.0% in 2001 to 13.7% in 2006. This increase in the proportion of seniors was observed at the national level as well as in every province, territory and census metropolitan area in the country. Just as the baby boom generation affected elementary schools in the 1950s, colleges in the '60s and '70s, and the workplace in the '80s and '90s, it will also affect housing in the decades to come.

The upcoming and current generation of retirees and semi-retirees are not settling for the retirement centres of the past. Massive housing complexes are not attractive to many seniors and they will likely not choose to be tucked away, out of sight, in self-contained communities. Seniors today want to live in real communities, with neighbours, shops, services and entertainment. Many wish that these amenities will be in walking distance as they choose to drive less. The examples presented in this document provide seniors with options other than being segregated. By incorporating visitable, adaptable and multi-generational designs to dwelling options such as cohousing and secondary suites, seniors can live in innovative housing that promotes their independence and ability to age in place. (Statistics Canada, 2007; Statistics Canada, 2009)

4. Community Consultations

Community consultations took place at several different venues, including a gated seniors' community, 55+ apartment complex, independent living complex, assisted-living residential unit, and recreation centre. Each of these facilitations followed the same format, with the exception of the recreation centre, which included an additional static display. During the consultations, a variety of housing types, as described in the above examples, were displayed and discussed.

One important aspect, especially when considering the type of housing, is whether or not the seniors who participated lived within and among the community, or were independent within their own 55+ community. This would determine whether or not (respectively) they would regard multi-generational housing as a viable option.

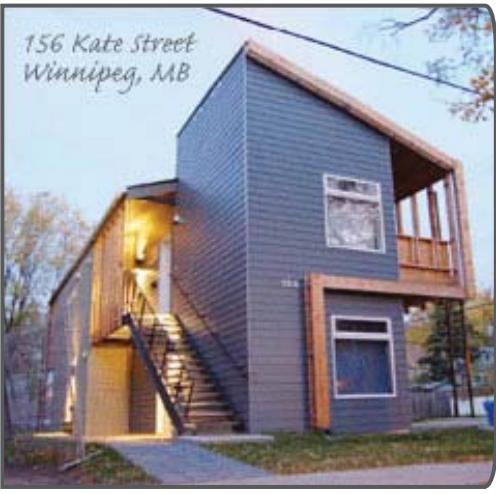


Figure 12. Pocket housing/micro-suites provide affordable housing options, especially for single seniors without families close by. Source: www.sam.mb.ca/pockethouses/inovation.html

For the most part, pocket suites/micro-housing was regarded as being a niche housing option that would support homeless or single seniors only (Figure 12). When viewed, most participants stated that the units were far too small, institutional, and not a viable option for seniors.

The cohousing option was received with mixed reviews depending upon the community and living accommodations, as stated above. Being that cohousing is a multi-generational housing option, seniors living within their select communities of 55+, and not active within the surrounding community, did not favour this option at all, unless it was made to be 55+. Other seniors valued the “community within a community” aspect and viewed this option positively. During the facilitations, most participants thought the visitable or adaptable options were common sense solutions that should be integral in the design of all houses.

FlexHousing was also received with mixed reviews (Figure 13). The most common response when viewed was that this was ideal for younger people, either young families, single mothers or those who might need supplemented income. Many of the responses revolved around the issues of mobility and the ability of the individual to manoeuvre up stairs, and the extra costs of putting in lifts to assist those who may need it.



Figure 13. FlexHousing options provide flexible mortgages, an option for secondary incomes because of rentable suites, and mixed use. Source: City of Abbotsford.

The most common response pertaining to secondary or garden suites was that it was suitable, but only if the residence for the seniors was located on the main floor and the family, or other tenant was in the suite. Although several options were presented, the seniors preferred the idea of having the main house or main residence to themselves (Figure 14). Other comments included the benefit of having a supplemented income as a result of having renters in the suite and increasing the value of the home.



Figure 14. Secondary, garden or granny (mother-in-law) suites provide an option for multi-generational housing, income supplementation, and aging in place. Source: <http://blog.frontdoor.com>

The option of greyfield redevelopment/mixed-use was received as being one of the best options because it provided a community that had multiple uses, green space, and was walkable. Many participants liked this option because it seemed a viable alternative to the communities they currently live in, and one that would fulfill the needs of all residents.

One alternative presented by some participants was the idea of multi-generational housing in the form of duplexes or triplexes that have a common area for social gathering/meeting, especially for inter-generational family households. This type of housing would have a different classification than a secondary suite or granny suite and would also be different than a duplex or triplex. This type of housing could benefit the community and would permit aging in place.

As a result of the facilitations, it is clear that there are several housing options that can be integrated in the community and be pursued by the City of Abbotsford through bylaw amendments, policy recommendations, and land use changes. It is also clear that housing options vary according to the needs of the community in which they are situated and the level of inclusion within the community. It is necessary to ensure that there is the provision of more than one particular housing option in order to meet the diverse needs of the seniors' community.

5. Case Study: Clearbrook-Mill Lake Area

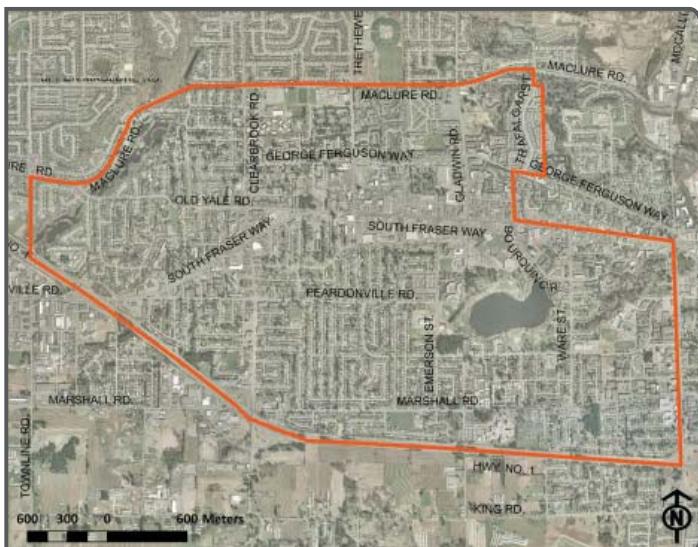


Figure 15. Aerial photo of Clearbrook-Mill Lake area in Abbotsford.

Clearbrook-Mill Lake is located in the city centre and is one of Abbotsford's older established areas (Figure 15). As such, it is often subject to redevelopment and zoning changes. The demographics within this area show that there will be an increase in the number of adults who are over the age of 55 years within the next 20 years, so much that this age group will be greater than all others combined. It is evident that this area would greatly benefit from the development of seniors housing.

A demographic study of the Clearbrook-Mill Lake area investigated household income, immigration periods, household sizes, dwelling types, period of construction, living arrangements and age, all of which are pertinent to the delivery of affordable seniors housing and adequate housing types.

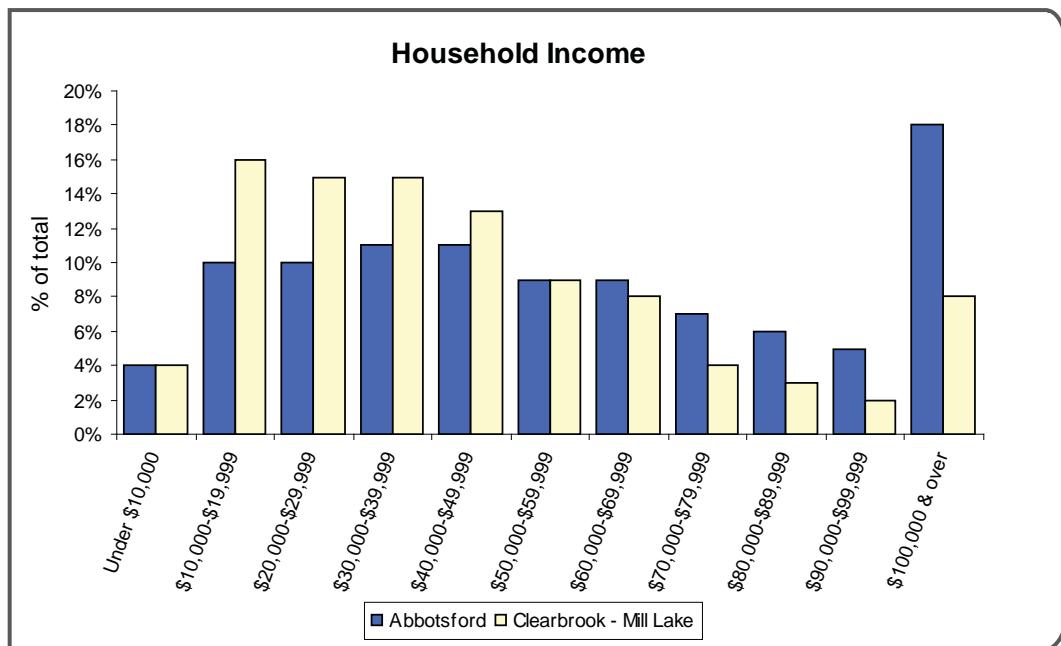


Table 1. Income distribution in Abbotsford and Clearbrook-Mill Lake.

Thirty percent of the population residing in Clearbrook-Mill Lake live below the three-person low income cut-off¹, also known as the poverty line, earning \$34,022 annually. Sixteen percent of residents live below the one-person low income cut-off earning \$22,229 annually, showing the need for affordable housing in this area (Table 1). Additionally, the social disparity between the City of Abbotsford and the neighbourhoods shows a clear difference between wealth distributions, increasing the viability of mixed neighbourhoods, wherein there is a combination of housing types.

The most dominant period of immigration for Abbotsford was between 1991 and 2000, while Clearbrook-Mill Lake experienced the highest level of immigration before 1961 (Table 2). The immigration periods coincide with economic development and growth in the City. Over the next twenty years, the area will see another shift due to a change in the demographics as the population begins to age (Table 3).

¹ Low income cut-offs are income thresholds that evaluate household expenditures to analyse how money is spent. The threshold is the level below which families will begin to devote most of their income to the daily necessities of food, shelter and clothing than an average-income family would. (Statistics Canada, 2009)

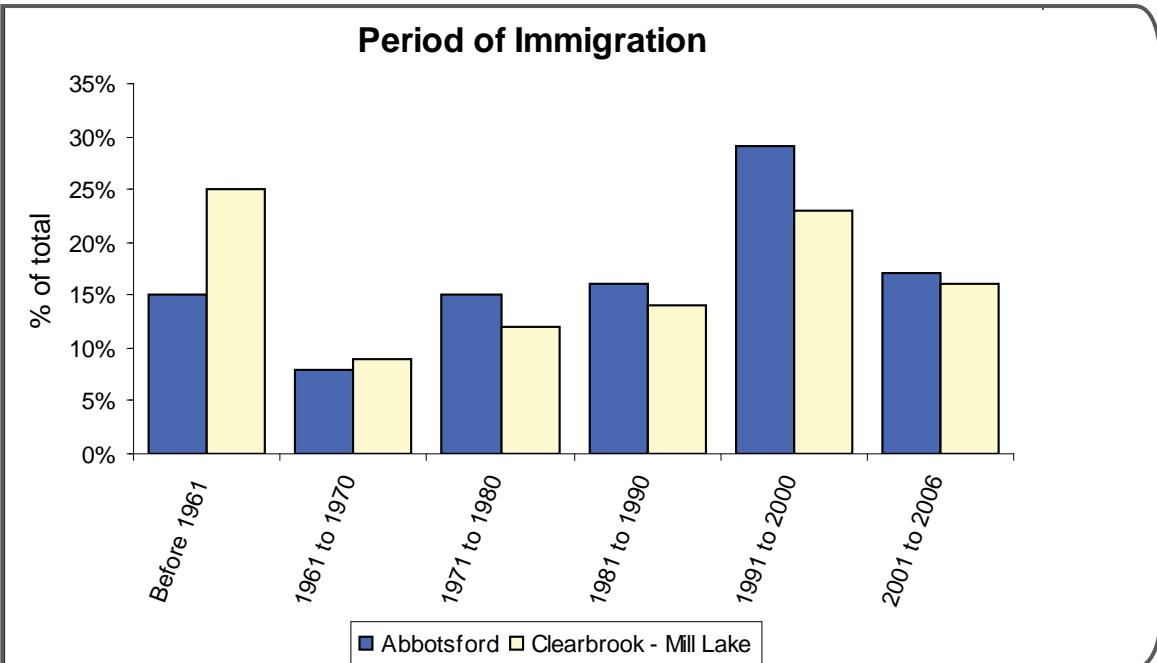


Table 2. The settlement of the Clearbrook-Mill Lake area mostly occurred prior to the 1960's and the period between 1991 and 2000, and stagnated in the five years between 2001 and 2006.

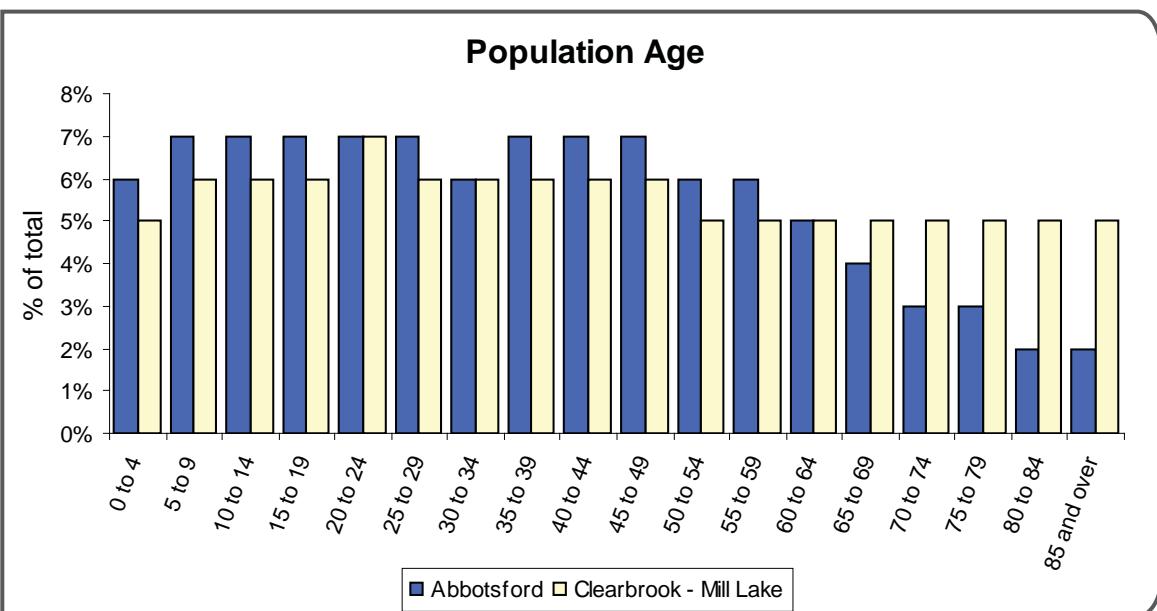


Table 3. The age ranges in the Clearbrook-Mill Lake area vary from 52% under the age of 49 and 45% over the age of 50 years, with 25% of the population being 50+ within the next 20 years.

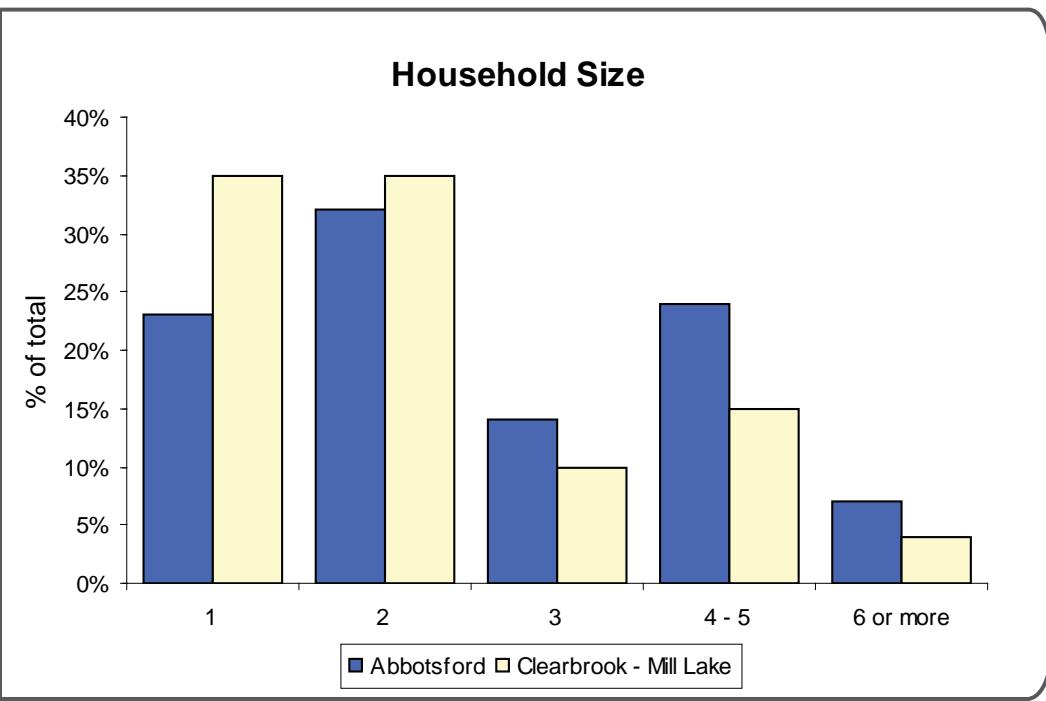


Table 4. Average household size in the Clearbrook-Mill Lake area is one to two people.

Through the course of the study, it became apparent that most of the households were one to two member families who prefer to live in apartment style housing, which is an important aspect when assessing the type of housing that would best suit the neighbourhood and the residents therein (Table 4 & 5). Additionally, housing starts, construction, and development has decreased steadily over the last 20 years, showing a markedly aging community that will need regeneration in the near future (Table 6), leading to areas of revitalization that will benefit from land use changes and development initiatives for seniors.

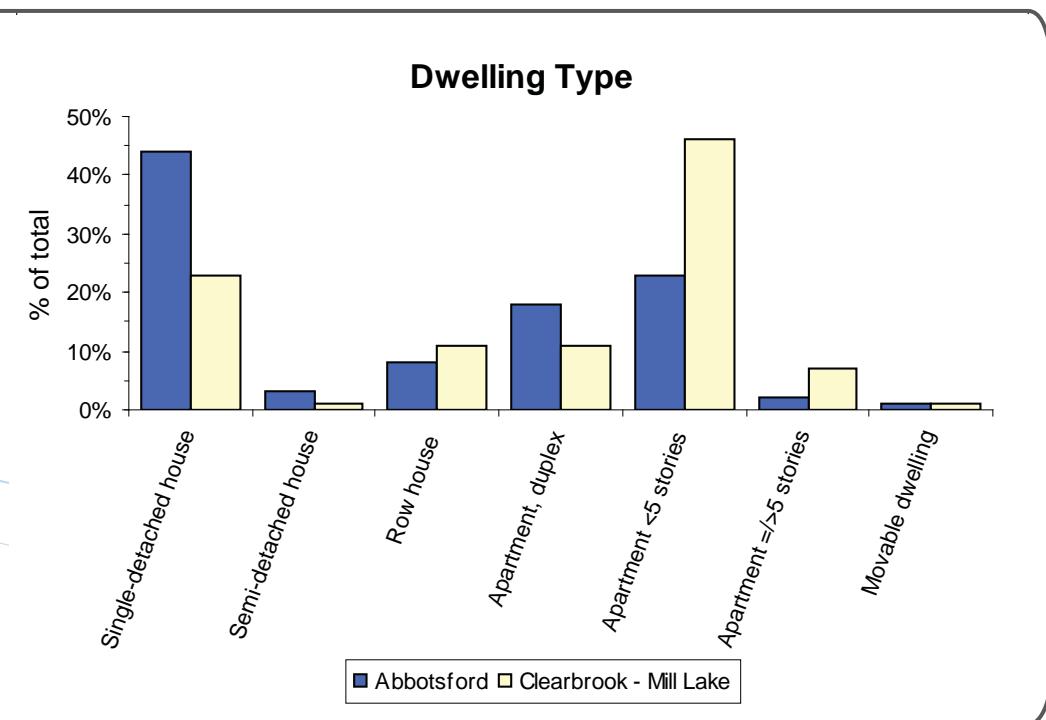


Table 5. The main type of dwelling in the Clearbrook-Mill Lake area is apartments, less than five stories.

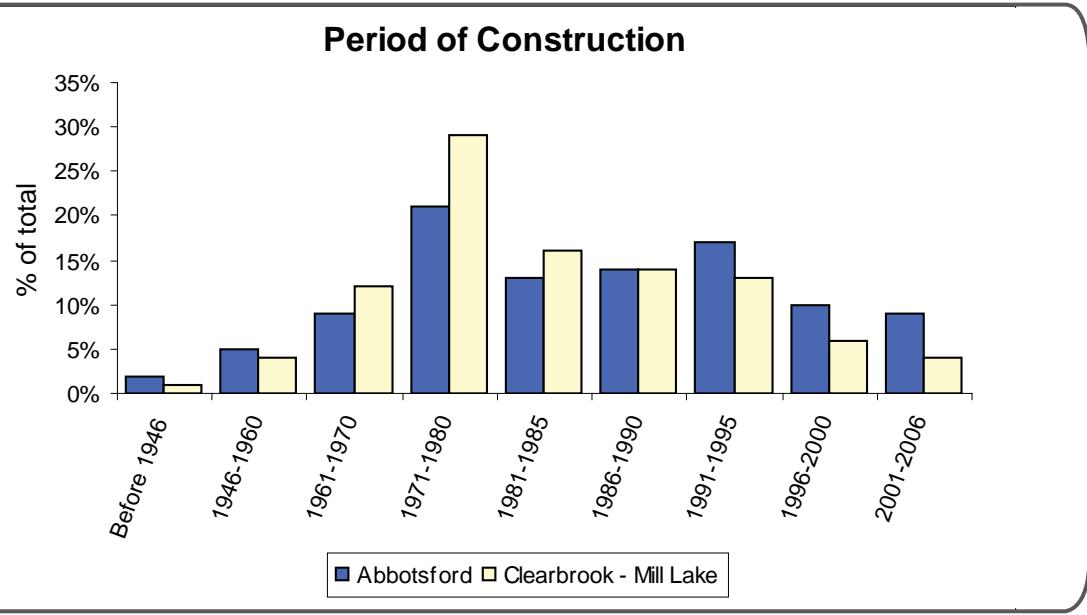


Table 6. New construction in the Clearbrook-Mill Lake area has declined steadily since 1980.

According to the living arrangements in the Clearbrook-Mill Lake area, approximately one-third of seniors over 65 years live on their own or with non-family persons, which may either be in 55+ apartments or assisted living complexes (Table 7). The type of housing that would best suit the Clearbrook-Mill Lake area would be an alternative to the single-family dwelling type, and could have the potential for multi-generational and alternative multi-housing types.

Living Arrangements	Abbotsford		Clearbrook - Mill Lake	
	Persons 65 years and over by living arrangements	16,350	7,306	
Non-family persons	5,215	32%	2,716	37%
Living with relatives	1,020	6%	274	4%
Living with non-relatives only	170	1%	50	1%
Living alone	4,025	25%	2,388	33%
Family persons	11,130	68%	4,572	63%

Table 7. Approximately one-third of seniors in the Clearbrook-Mill Lake area live on their own or with non-family persons.

Following the demographic study of the Clearbrook-Mill Lake area, it became evident that this area will soon need to be redeveloped to suit the aging population. These neighbourhoods contain a variety of uses, open space, parks and recreation, commerce and business, retail, and single and multi-family dwellings. The particular demographics prove it to be relevant in the investigation of the viability of different housing types, while also implying the need for seniors housing.

6. Policy Recommendations & Planning Opportunities

Following the literature review, case studies, and community consultations, several planning opportunities for seniors housing within the City were developed.

1. Incorporate several age in place principles, such as multi-use zoning, infill guidelines, pedestrian friendly urban design guidelines, transit nodes and corridor planning, parks and open space planning, design guidelines, and Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles, to align with Strategy 1 of the Official Community Plan. This strategy promotes the development of a complete community that offers a full range of housing opportunities to the whole community, including seniors. These principles would also be important to include throughout the City in order to promote complete communities.
2. Create opportunities for developing a variety of seniors housing by updating zoning regulations in commercial, urban residential and suburban residential zones to incorporate the same principles, and to streamline the efficacy and ease with which such developments can be made. Particularly, focus should be placed on urban development centres, leading to increased mixed-use developments that are more viable than homogeneous neighbourhoods. One particular area that can be further investigated for policy review and implementation is the Mount Lehman and Fraser Highway connection (Figure 16).

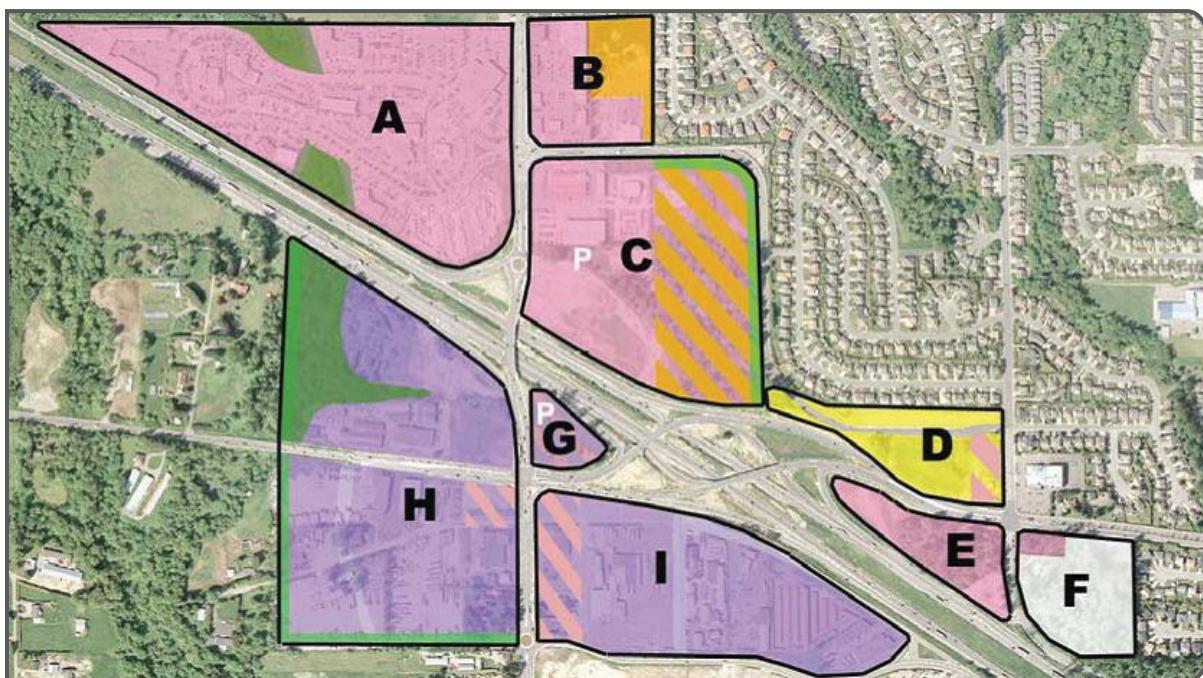


Figure 16. Mount Lehman Land Use Concept Plan for future development.

- Integrate age friendly urban design guidelines including multi-use buildings such as schools, community and recreation centres, meeting halls, and multi-use open spaces (European square ideas) particularly in established neighbourhoods, such as those shown in Figure 17. The specific areas where such guidelines would be beneficial include neighbourhood commercial zones, parks, open spaces, schools, and comprehensive development zones. The integration of uses provides a foundation for inclusion in area plans, and future land use changes.

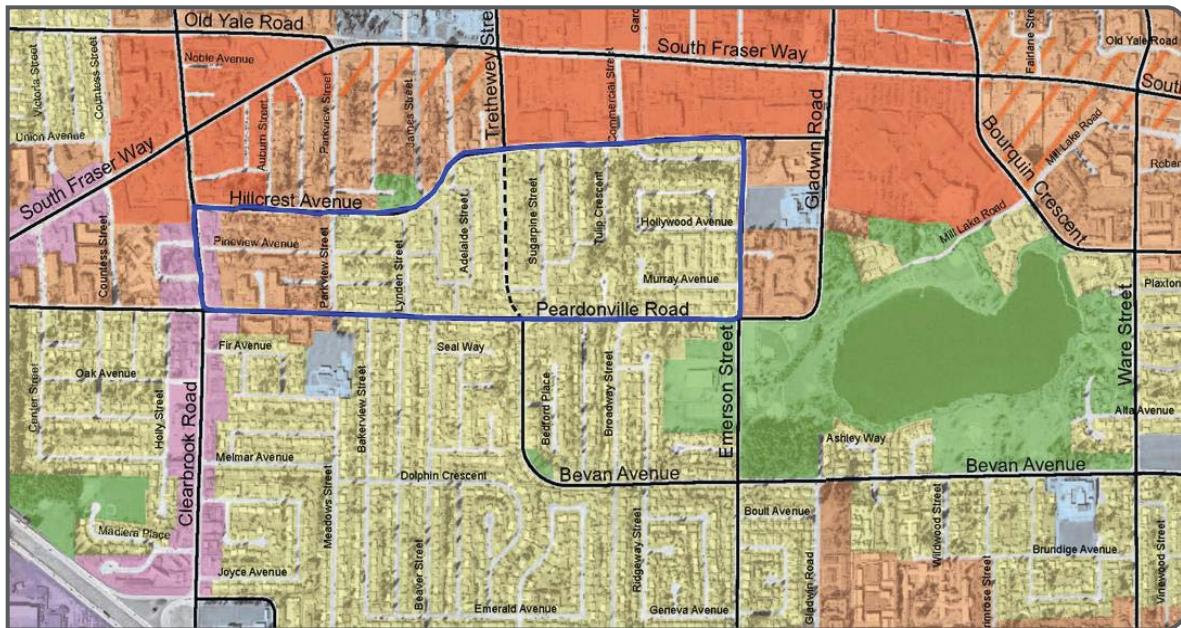


Figure 17. Areas on the land use map outlined in blue have the potential for redevelopment or are areas that have a suitable location for rezoning to implement several of the concepts presented in the Seniors Housing Study.

- Ensure that a greyfield redevelopment demonstrative project provides the viability for future development to include barrier-free, age friendly, pedestrian friendly, mixed-use development that encourages growth, and serves the local and greater community. As outlined in Objective 3 (3.2) in the Official Community Plan to foster a safer city, it is necessary to ensure that there are safe and walkable paths to enhance mobility. This could potentially be done within the proposed University District (U-District) area that will encourage “high street” development and encourage multi-use zoning, such as mixed residential, street townhouse residential, multi-unit residential flex, neighbourhood commercial, and secondary business commercial zones (Figure 18).
- Enhance the viability of rezoning and bylaw amendments that pertain to senior’s housing and developments through engaging the local seniors’ community in the planning process for large redevelopment study areas.
- Enhance current policy directions within the Official Community Plan to align with the findings of this study. Promote the secondary suite policy for new one and two unit rural, country, suburban, urban and city residential areas, and in mixed residential areas.



Figure 18. Aerial photo of the U-District area which has a lot of potential opportunity for greyfield redevelopment and policy revision.

7. Encourage shopping centres to complete site audits and recommend improvements to be age friendly.
8. Collaborate with seniors to educate and encourage groups such as the Urban Development Institute - Pacific Region, Planning Institute of British Columbia, Canadian Home Builders' Association, British Columbia Society of Landscape Architects, and the Architectural Institute of British Columbia on the importance of incorporating aging in place planning principles and practices.

7. Conclusion

The City of Abbotsford is working to meet current and future housing needs for seniors, ensuring an age friendly community and sustainable social development that promotes aging in place. The goal of the Seniors Housing Study was to determine seniors housing needs by consulting local seniors, community and government agencies, completing a literature review, case-studies, and policy, zoning and bylaw reviews.

Consultation with seniors in Abbotsford provided the opportunity to discuss what was currently working and how seniors favoured their current housing provisions. The findings revealed that many of the housing options seniors reside in, including assisted living apartments, seniors apartments, and gated-communities, provide more social networking and care inside the community than out. Such housing (particularly the gated townhouse communities) provides the best opportunity for aging in place due to the large community of caring residents and managers. The information from these facilitations helped provide a foundation for policy and bylaw review to assist in developing suitable seniors housing, while also meeting the needs of the community at large.

The Clearbrook-Mill Lake area case study also provided valuable insight into a particular community as it revealed existing housing types, age of the population and forecasted changes, median household income, and living arrangements within the community. It was clear that this particular area will require housing for a large number of seniors in the future, and there will be a need for low income individual housing (which could include micro-housing/pocket suites), as well as the opportunity for co-generational housing opportunities, which may include secondary/garden suites, cohousing, or semi-detached housing for inter-generational family members.

As a result of the consultations, recommendations regarding current and future housing need focused on affordability, accessibility, and visitability, were created. The policy, zoning, and bylaw review revealed several areas that the City of Abbotsford will be able to strengthen the vision of creating an inclusive complete community. The policy recommendations developed through this study will be incorporated into the Zoning Bylaw, Official Community Plan, Affordable Housing Strategy, and Building Code to ensure there is adequate response to the increased need for innovative seniors housing in the City.

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Appendix 1: Facilitations

1.1 Crown Point II

The retirement complex of Crown Point is a gated 55+ community built in 1989. There are 148 homes in the complex, and it is secure and private with a security office located at the entrance. It offers a central community centre that boasts a workshop, ceramic shop, craft room, billiards, and has a medium serving area for social gatherings.

During the facilitation the group was asked to answer several questions that pertained to their community, housing, and what they feel would be their future needs. The most frequently received comments made during the facilitation were:

1. The neighbourhood is gated, there are reasonable strata fees, and a lot of social activities on site.
2. Abbotsford is a great city to live in, not too big and close to the big city when needed.
3. There is wonderful volunteerism within the neighbourhood, the community, and Abbotsford.
4. There is a need for "home help" to make it feasible to stay home, to look after day-to-day needs.
5. There is a need for shopping near the complex, and/or safer pathways to access local shopping areas.

Following the discussion regarding the different housing options, comments included:

1. Pocket housing/micro-suites are "doable" for those who want to be independent and live near family or friends, and for the homeless, but is not suitable for couples, or for seniors.
2. Cohousing needs to be subsidized, but must be 55+, not multi-generational, and must be easily accessible.
3. Visitable housing is most practical, but that such upgrades should be made through the whole house rather than just the main floor.
4. Adaptable housing makes sense for families as they get older, but it is not a consideration for those already living in the complex.
5. FlexHousing is not great, as the suites were questionable in their propriety for their age or for their needs. It is necessary to define "affordable" as it pertains to housing and senior's income.
6. Greyfield/mixed-use is appropriate because of the proximity to shopping and other amenities, especially if health care providers are located near. In addition, the courtyard/greenspace was well liked as it provided a place for social gathering.
7. Secondary/garden suites are good if living with family, and/or having the main floor. Inspection to ensure quality and upkeep should also be mandatory.

During this facilitation, it was clear that the residents enjoyed their complex and believed that it is the best type of housing for seniors. One of the most common statements made at the facilitation was the City of Abbotsford needs to plan for more assisted living accommodations that are affordable and subsidized. Moreover, the residents did not believe that any of these housing options were applicable to them, as they already live in such a great community. Some of the residents were also not in favour of multi-generational housing or living near children.

1.2 Abbotsford Recreation Centre

The Abbotsford Recreation Centre (ARC) offers the local community many different services and programs for a variety of ages and abilities. ARC offers a senior's centre for adults aged 55 and over. The senior's centre provides a variety of services, such as education programs, social gatherings (games, events, etc.), and recreation programs that are focused on senior health and welfare. The facilitation was completed in an informal manner with a static display remaining at the recreation centre for the week of June 6 to 12, for Senior's Week.

During the facilitation, the group was asked to answer several questions that pertained to their community, housing, and what they feel would be their future needs. The most common comments made during the facilitation were:

1. Abbotsford is a great city to live in.
2. There is access to public transportation.
3. Abbotsford is still cheaper than most communities in the Lower Mainland.
4. There is an effort to look after the poor.

Following the discussion regarding the different housing options, comments included:

1. Pocket housing/micro-suites are good for a particular population, a place to "hang their hat" or for the homeless, but are too small for regular seniors.
2. Cohousing helps build community, is very common in European communities, and is a good idea for the future.
3. Visitable housing looks like a reasonable idea.
4. Adaptable housing is a great idea that is good for aging families.
5. FlexHousing might be a good idea, but may be better for younger people.
6. Greyfield/mixed-use is a great idea, as it is close to the shops.
7. Secondary/garden suites are already applicable for some that want to live with their families and enables seniors to payout their mortgages.

The facilitation and static display proved beneficial in understanding the wide range of services and needs of the seniors' community. The range of respondents gave insight into the perspective of different cultures, with the comment that "North American cities should have modeled European housing, neighbourhoods, and transportation from the start," and low income single seniors commenting on "just needing a place to hang their hat." This dynamic highlights the necessity to have a holistic approach to housing issues, especially considering the variety of needs of the specific community.

1.3 Hillside Christian Reformed Church

Hillside Christian Reformed Church is a member church of the Christian Reformed Church of North America, and is a small congregation with meetings held at Abbotsford Christian Middle School. During the facilitation, the group was asked to answer several questions that pertained to their community, housing, and what they feel would be their future needs. The most common comments made during the facilitation were:

1. Being close to family, kids, and being able to host the family in a gathering place, and centre point.
2. Mobility is a big issue, particularly problems with stairs, travel, and transit.
3. Housing cost is very important.
4. Isolation is a big worry within the seniors community.
5. It is important to be close to amenities.

Following the discussion regarding the different housing options, comments included:

1. Pocket housing/micro-suites are too small.
2. Cohousing is interesting, especially when living in the community on purpose.
3. Visitable housing is practical, and makes sense.
4. Adaptable housing makes sense and is good planning for future houses.
5. FlexHousing is viable if the children purchased them and the seniors lived in the suite.
6. Secondary/garden suites work in many neighbourhoods, however, the question is "what happens when the neighbourhood changes and suites are rented to non-family?". The same is true with the coach houses.

1.4 Cascade Court

Cascade Court is a 55 years and over community that was developed by the Salvation Army's Grace Communities Corporation to help fill the need of the local community's growing need for seniors housing. There are approximately 85 residents at Cascade Court, with a live-in caretaker. The caretaker helps with the necessary day-to-day maintenance, gardening, and residential needs of the people who live there. The residents do not have major mobility or health issues that would otherwise create a need for greater care and day-to-day living assistance. The community is close to transit, church, and a mini-mart; it is accessible, quiet, and safe.

During the facilitation, the group was asked to answer several questions that pertained to their community, housing, and what they feel would be their future needs. The most common comments made during the facilitation were:

1. There is a general need for walkability throughout Abbotsford.
2. In general, Abbotsford is a nice place to live, especially in the particular community.
3. There is a lack of mixed neighbourhoods, to create a community where one can age in place that seems to be the norm in Europe.
4. There is a need for greater extended care with independent living facilities.
5. There is a need for better medical assistance for seniors.

Following the discussion regarding the different housing options, comments included:

1. Pocket housing/micro-suites are too small, but suited for the low-income seniors, or the homeless.
2. Cohousing makes sense, helps with deinstitutionalization, is a good idea for future seniors (too late for them), and is a common practice in Holland that works and helps build community.
3. Visitable housing was seen as making the most sense and should be common practice, as should adaptable housing.
4. Adaptable housing makes sense for younger people to be able to age in place, but is too late for this population (as they are beyond aging in place).
5. FlexHousing was not positively viewed and seen as questionable, especially considering the possibility of stairs, and when considering possible safety issues. Moreover, it would be necessary to have the main floor due to mobility issues. The idea of a flex mortgage and income support was considered as a more appropriate option for single mothers and young adults trying to find affordable housing.
6. Greyfield/mixed-use is a good idea as it is walkable, close to all amenities (including open areas and park space), and makes perfect sense.
7. Secondary/garden suites create a “pause for concern” in meeting proper code and inspection. The suites are feasible, but only if living upstairs, as some seniors would not want to live downstairs or in the garage. It would be mandatory to ensure that the suites were well maintained.

During this facilitation, it became evident that there is a need for more housing that allows for aging in place, including the adaptable and visitable options. The cohousing option in this community was also well received because it has proven effective in Europe and in other Canadian communities. The greatest need within the local community is in the provision of better medical care options for independent living seniors.

1.5 Hallmark

Hallmark on the Park is a 69-room facility that offers assisted living. The residents are offered full meals, snacks, a post office, and are allowed pets. The facility is located near an award-winning park that is peaceful and natural, and includes aquatic life and wildflowers.

During the facilitation, the group was asked to answer several questions that pertained to their community, housing, and what they feel would be their future needs. The most common comments made during the facilitation were:

1. Amenities are close, as is church, the border, and within their building is a library, post office, security, and it is not institutionalized.
2. Like the seniors program in Abbotsford.
3. Ramps and sidewalks are not easily walkable, which they need to be.
4. Abbotsford is getting very busy and is often dangerous to walk in.
5. Abbotsford is not friendly to mobility challenged persons.

Following the discussion regarding the different housing options, comments included:

1. Pocket housing/micro-suites are too small.
2. Cohousing is unattractive, with too many children around.
3. Visitable housing is a step in the right direction.
4. Adaptable housing makes sense and is reasonable.
5. FlexHousing is good for university students, or young families. It would be necessary to live on the main floor.
6. Greyfield/mixed-use is a great idea, but the stores would have to close early and the housing would have to be on the main floor.
7. Secondary/garden suites are a good income generator and good idea overall.

The main outcome of this facilitation was the support of more residences that are similar to the one in which they are currently living.

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