

**Municipality Of Chatham-Kent**  
**Community Human Services**  
**Employment & Social Services**  
**Information Report**

**To:** Mayor and Members of Council  
**From:** Tara Lauzon, Supervisor, Employment and Social Services Division  
**Date:** January 6, 2021  
**Subject:** HomeShare Program

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This report is for the information of Council.

**Background**

At the November 23, 2020 Council meeting, the following motion was presented by Councillor Latimer:

**“Whereas there are 749 individuals currently on the wait list for affordable and/or geared to income housing in CK.**

**Whereas CK has a significant volume of under utilized housing capacity across the municipality with a growing senior population wishing to safely and independently age in place for as long as possible.**

**Whereas CK remains a “housing first” champion.**

**Therefore be it resolved that Community Human Services and Community Development staff investigate and report back to Council by January 14, 2021 on the requirements for implementation, maintenance and potential community partnership benefits of enabling provision of a Chatham Kent Homeshare Program, the aim of which is to ensure that all home providers and home seekers in Chatham-Kent have an opportunity to live in affordable, shared accommodation with peace of mind, financial resilience and mutual support and benefit for all parties involved.”**

An extension was granted to bring this matter to the February 1, 2021 Council meeting.

The purpose of this report is to investigate the requirements of implementing and maintaining a HomeShare Program in Chatham-Kent.

As stated by Councillor Latimer in the Motion, the intent of the HomeShare Program is to ensure that all home providers and home seekers in Chatham-Kent have an

opportunity to live in affordable, shared accommodations with peace of mind, financial resilience, mutual support, and benefit for all parties involved.

## **Comments**

### Program Overview

The concept of a HomeShare Program is multifaceted. Simply put, it creates equal housing opportunity while benefiting both the home provider and the home seeker. There are two operational models generally used in HomeShare Programs, the 'counselling model' or the 'referral model'.

The counselling model is the most prevalent and consists of the program coordinators screening potential candidates, matching them, negotiating an agreement, and continuing to monitor and support both parties.

The referral model is when the program coordinators receive applications from home seekers, and then provide them to the home provider to screen and continue on in the process. This model is less comprehensive and provides little ongoing support to either party.

An environmental scan has been completed on several HomeShare Programs. The most valuable data, however, came from HomeShare Vermont due to the program's 30+ years of experience.

There are several variations of the program in terms of who the home seekers may be. For example, in Ottawa the target is the LGBTQ2S+ population; whereas, in Toronto and Sarnia-Lambton, the focus is on students. The most common denominator in the majority of HomeShare programs is that the home provider is an older adult.

Similarly, there are different types of HomeShare agreements depending on the match made. There is the common option of an affordable rent amount (some programs cap rent amounts) or it could be that the home seeker has agreed to provide companionship or light house duties for a reduced or zero rent amount.

### Program Outcomes

In 2019, HomeShare Vermont matched 202 participants; 127 new homes available to share; average rent was \$296/month; 22,354 hours of service from staff and volunteers; and the average match length was 364 days. Of those participants matched, 94% were very satisfied, 37% of those sharing their home reported that they would not be able to live safely and comfortable at home without a home sharer, 78% felt less lonely, 76% felt safer in their home, and 43% felt healthier.

Over the last four years, Halton HomeShare has had two matches; 113 inquiries; 48 applications completed; 24 eligible participants; 12 match and meets; five trial stays. The Regional Municipality of Halton has a population of 548,435.

### Funding Model

In 2019, HomeShare Vermont's funding was 38.6% government grants; 27.1% private foundations; 19% donations/special events; 4.8% investments/interest earnings; 3.9% United Way; 3.8% donated services; 2.8% fees and rental income.

The expenses for the same year were 52% salaries; 13.8% payroll/taxes; 6.3% equipment/misc.; 5.8% outreach/marketing; 4.5% occupancy/depreciation; 4.5% postage/printing; 4.5% volunteer service; 2.6% insurance/professional services; 1.4% events.

### Benefits

A HomeShare Program offers many benefits to both the home seeker and the home provider. It can bring companionship, reduce isolation, and provide security. This is a cost effective program that is affordable for the home seeker. If the agreement entails a place to live in exchange for household responsibilities, this may enable the home provider to remain in their own home longer.

HomeShare can keep people in the communities they know and care for, rather than having to move due to lack of affordable housing. In turn, this keeps people actively engaged in their communities.

In the HomeShare Program outcomes mentioned earlier, it has been clearly demonstrated that the overall health and well-being of the home provider and home seeker improved while participating.

### Potential Pitfalls

The most common concern with a HomeShare program is that there is no protection for the home seeker under the Landlord and Tenant Act. The home seeker in these cases is referred to as a 'licensee' and the home provider is the 'licensor'. The licensee has very minimal legal protection as they can be evicted without notice if rent is not paid; or with notice for any other reason.

If there is a dispute between the home provider and the home seeker, it would be covered under contract law and would therefore be heard in a Small Claims Court and in some cases the Superior Court. Although written HomeShare agreements are helpful to outline the responsibilities of both parties, they are still not necessarily binding when it comes to case law.

The lesser common concern is surrounding opportunities for fraud, elder abuse or taking advantage of the home seeker's potentially vulnerable situation.

HomeShare Vermont shared that there has been one case in the last 30 years that came about surrounding an accusation of fraud. Trust in the initial screening and interview process is credited to this single event being the only one in the history of the program. Using the 'counselling model' also ensures that each match is closely monitored and regular contact is made.

Lastly, to be successful, a large pool of applicants is required. This can be accomplished by continually recruiting new candidates through a strong outreach program. If there is a small pool of only 10 people looking for housing and 10 offering a room in their home, it is unlikely that you will make a single match. If you have 100 in each pool, 20 matches may be made. It will be difficult to match all applicants as they may not be a good fit for homesharing, or perhaps the program provider is unable find what they need.

### Program Start-up and Timelines

A new HomeShare Program should expect a three-year start-up phase, as outlined below.

Year 1: Complete feasibility study; build volunteer base (ongoing); build community support (ongoing)

Year 2: Determine program design; develop policies and procedures; recruit volunteers and staff; raise funds for operation of program

Year 3: Open the doors; constant outreach, marketing, and branding

The majority of HomeShare programs operate under the umbrella of an organization specializing in working with vulnerable populations, such as seniors, low income, etc. In these specific cases, the majority of frontline staff would be volunteers. As such, it would be beneficial to choose an organization that already uses volunteer staff in their daily operations so that they are familiar with the logistics of this.

HomeShare Vermont is a standalone organization, however this took years to accomplish and was largely in part to the program's great success across several counties in Vermont. The population of the state of Vermont in 2019 was 623,989.

In order to implement a successful HomeShare Program in Chatham-Kent, it would need to operate within a non-profit organization that works with the more vulnerable populations. Research has shown that the majority of HomeShare programs are attached to organizations working primarily with seniors. As such, a HomeShare Program in Chatham-Kent would certainly compliment an existing senior's program that at present uses volunteers for service.

In a suitable community, a HomeShare Program could be yet another solution to providing a larger housing inventory. A complete feasibility study would need to be conducted, which can cost up to \$25,000. This has been strongly recommended when considering a HomeShare Program.

Starting a new HomeShare Program takes several years and even then, there is no guarantee that in a small community like Chatham-Kent, it will have much success.

Based on the findings, the time requirements and low likelihood of significant numbers of uptake into the program in a community of this size, the Director of Employment and

Social Services does not recommend the Municipality funding a HomeShare Program at this time.

**Consultation**

There was no consultation required for this report.

**Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications resulting from this report.

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Attachment: None

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