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PLANNING FOR AN AGE OF LONGEVITY

ARE SECONDARY DWELLINGS A WAY OF HOUSING THE INCREASING NUMBER OF OLDER PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY, AND COULD RESIDENTIAL ELDERLY FRIENDLY ZONES BE A USEFUL WAY FOR COUNCILS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE ELDERLY.

IS AN "AGE QUAKE" ON ITS WAY?

Most of us are aware of and accept that an ageing population is one of today's most significant social issues, but have we really given much thought to how this perceived "demographic problem" will alter the future structure and shape of our cities? If we don't start planning for it soon the "age quake" will hit, and we won't be prepared. We need to learn to see age not as a burden but as a resource and be able to convert any perceived problems into opportunities.

One of the big problems in planning for an ageing population is that the elderly are not a homogenous group, they are as diverse as society itself, they are a multifaceted group ranging in age from 50 plus to 85 plus, with the maximum life span now expected to be something closer to 120 years.

So how do you go about housing such a

diverse group of society? One way is through the use of secondary dwellings.

ARE SECONDARY DWELLINGS PART OF THE SOLUTION?

Secondary dwellings could be:

- a relocatable granny flat; there is already provision for these by some local authorities in New Zealand, and they are successful in Canada under its garden suite programme (discussed in more detail later)
- additions above garages or connected to the sides of houses; often favoured in new urbanism developments so that affordability and variety are included
- a garage conversion; such as the American homesuite idea which temporarily fits out an attached garage for an elderly or sick relative to live in.

Secondary dwellings can serve a variety of



The elderly are an important part of a lifestyle community

both community and individual needs, by contributing to variety in housing sizes, encouraging intergenerational living, and by allowing the elderly to age in place from their middle years in a particular community. They can be the bridge between the elderly living alone and moving into an institution.

Secondary dwellings may also be more acceptable in cities such as Auckland where there are a number of concerns and negativity about the increasing intensification of residential areas and the erosion of amenity. A smaller dwelling can:

- be kinder on the environment
- have less impermeable surface
- make the best use of a site in terms of resource efficiency, especially if the site is too small to subdivide
- encourage a mixture of ages and incomes in an area
- make the neighbourhood appear less "crowded"
- have less affect on the quality of life of neighbours
- use existing services, though there are concerns about stress on infrastructure, such as traffic, parking and stormwater systems
- contribute to the desired outcome of a more compact city.

Studies done in Australia show that elderly people have been particularly receptive to medium density housing, which suggests that more of this type of development could be built to meet the housing needs of elderly in the future. However research in Auckland on housing demand and supply found that there is a degree of uncertainty over whether elderly people will trade down to smaller homes, in part because of their increasing mobility and health.

If local authorities had a consistent and co-ordinated approach to secondary dwellings, with the same rules and application processes across the Auckland region and/or New Zealand, this would result in equal access and more uptake of the use of secondary dwellings. A number of issues would need to be resolved first including, whether secondary dwellings could be used to house family members other than granny, whether they would be temporary or permanent dwellings and whether they could be rented out to non family members. The dwellings themselves would also need to be of good design and quality, incorporate universal

MUNICIPAL GARDEN SUITE APPROVAL CHECKLIST

OCCUPANT(S)

Are the occupants seniors or disabled?

Are the occupants in need of some support and care services which can be provided by the host family?

HOST FAMILY

Is the host family the owner of the property for which the application has been submitted?

Is the host family the owner of the property for which the application has been submitted?

Is the owner of the garden suite unit someone other than the host family/applicant?

LAND USE BY-LAW

Has a tea party or information session for the neighbours been held by the applicant?

Will local servicing capacity accommodate the unit?

Does the development and accompanying site plan proposed for the garden suite unit comply with the definition and provision of the land use by-law?

Definition

Setbacks

Site Grading

Parking

Walkways

Amenity space

Easements

Service connections

Gas Line Setback

Are the soil conditions satisfactory to support the garden suite?

Are any restrictive covenants in effect which might prevent the placement of a garden suite unit?

Are special installation techniques required?

Are septic systems functioning adequately or are remedial measures required to accommodate additional flows from the garden suite?

Figure 1: Example of a garden suite pre-approval check list

design standards and include assisted technology where possible.

THE CANADIAN EXPERIENCE

Canada's garden suites are offered as an independent alternative to the high public cost of dependent institutional care of the elderly. They are temporary one level relocatable one to two bedroom free standing dwellings, built to the side or rear of an existing single dwelling. They are variable in size, but on average have a gross floor area of 60 square metres, plus additional space for landscaping and outdoor use.

They are usually rented out by a third party such as a housing ministry, agency, or non-profit, with various terms and conditions including access, compliance with building and zoning bylaws, and compatibility with the host designed dwelling. Local authorities assist customers with the approval process (see figure 1 for an example of a pre-approval checklist), and grant a "license" for a set time period. Once the garden suite is no longer needed by the occupant it is intended for, it must be removed.

One of the fears from the community of

these types of dwellings is that surrounding property values will decrease, but research has shown that property values did not decrease and the garden suites did not interfere with the enjoyment and use of neighbours. This is in part because garden suites are of good design and quality, are not located on front yards except on large rural blocks, and they have to adhere to setback requirements and minimum building separation distances.

Most existing zonings in Canada do not allow for garden suites as a permitted use, so garden suite guidelines could be developed to make them a discretionary activity. Another way to incorporate garden suites into a council plan would be to adopt a secondary suite policy area map, which shows where secondary suites could be located (similar to the REFZ concept discussed later). This is what was done in the District of Surrey in British Columbia, as part of its affordable housing programme.

CREATING A SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP

In planning for the increasing elderly ideally you should be aiming toward forming a symbiotic relationship between the needs of society and the elderly's needs, interests and

talents. Lifestyle communities would be created and nurtured and able to serve a range of demographic groups, and remain good places for people to live and reach their potential throughout their lives.

In reality this is difficult to achieve in part because of the limited information that we have, so we need to develop tools and develop research to better understand the needs of the elderly. We will then be able to implement appropriate policy with empathy and humility and keep in mind how we ourselves would like to live in our old age. One way of designing our cities to meet this goal is through the use of Residential Elderly Friendly Zones (REFZ).

RESIDENTIAL ELDERLY FRIENDLY ZONES

Raaijmakers has developed the idea of REFZ using a technique that allows for the measurement and analysis of the complex and integrated elements that relate to aging in place successfully. When looking at developing a REFZ there are a number of elements that need to exist including:

- well lit and even walking routes
- areas that are already service rich, rather than new developments that stimulate new service delivery
- available flat land
- land that is close to shops, transport, healthcare and other community services, which encourage cycling and walking in a comfortable and safe environment, (safe in terms of both injury and crime prevention).

These different environmental elements are synthesised together with extensive information from local elderly and service providers. This results in preference areas being identified and plans developed for changes to these areas to support independent ageing. This tool has been used in Amsterdam and Utrecht neighbourhoods in the Netherlands to evaluate existing areas and guide complex future policy and planning.

REFZ would be easier to develop in inner suburbs with higher density housing that facilitate social interaction, have a dense network of public transport and scattered services and shops, compared to outer suburbs that are lower in density, with high average distances to a transport stop and services and shops that are often concentrated in one area,

which make it much harder for older people to access.

REFZ would help councils meet affordable housing and smart growth objectives by increasing density without changing an area's character and without needing additional infrastructure.

CONCLUSION

This article has identified that housing an ageing population is a crucial planning issue, and that the provision of secondary dwellings are an important housing option that needs to be available for the elderly and their families.

Housing for the elderly cuts across boundaries and sectors, it should not be treated as a separate issue. What is needed are integrated complimentary policies that will lead to innovative forms of human settlement which are more closely aligned to lifestyle and more supportive of sustainable environments. Societies idea of what housing for the elderly means, needs to move away from the provision of "care" and "cupboards" and specialised institutions for a deserving few and become mainstream, creative, broad ranging and forward looking for future generations of elderly who are likely to be very different from the elderly of today.

Local authorities will continue to play a major role, but they will not be able to meet all the demands in the development of these new cities on their own. They need to consider the needs of an ageing population, and work in partnership with a number of other players, and become flexible and outward looking and proactive rather than reactive, in their planning for the future.-

REFZ's are one tool that local authorities can look towards, it offers a holistic approach that deals with both practical considerations and human interaction, and has been highlighted as one way forward but needs further investigation.

Stephanie Jowett completed this research as part of a Master of Planning Practice at the University of Auckland. Any opinions expressed in this article solely reflect those of the author.

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