

November 8, 2017

To the Standing Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources and Senator Judith Seidman

From the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC)

Responses to follow-up questions about Aging in Place

Senator Seidman: I'd like to ask you how you see (aging in place) as an important aspect of sustainability and the retrofit process.

RAIC: The RAIC supports older adults' desire to age in place, whether this means to grow old in the home where one raised children or in another non-institutional setting in the community. There is also a growing consensus that aging in place is the most cost-effective and appropriate way of supporting the needs of this population. We see a relationship between an aging society and environmental sustainability.

The RAIC Age-Friendly Housing Options Task Force is comprised of architects from across the country with expertise in designing for older Canadians. It was established in 2016 to investigate innovative housing options and best practice aging-in-place design guidelines. The work of the task force is to prepare detailed documentation and to advocate about the need for housing and communities that are designed to accommodate residents as they age. Advocacy is aimed at government, health care professionals and service providers, and the residential industry (homebuilders, renovators, realtors, and financial institutions).

Existing buildings comprise the majority of building stock and present significant opportunities for improvements. Recommissioning and retrofitting existing buildings – including single family houses, rental apartments, and condominiums – will reduce energy consumption and GHG emissions.

Retrofits for resilience and energy-efficiency represent one of the most impactful and cost-effective means of moving to a low-carbon economy. Given the vulnerability of older people to environmental threats, air quality, and temperature, they also have important implications for the health and well-being of older adults.

Energy efficiency improves residents' comfort and quality of life. Maintaining a comfortable temperature is easier and more affordable if a home is properly insulated and energy efficient. This is a particularly big issue for seniors on low and fixed incomes, who sometimes face difficulty paying for enough energy to keep their homes sufficiently warm during cold Canadian winters. ([This Green House II: Building Momentum on Green Jobs and Climate Action Through Energy Retrofits Across Canada, Columbia Institute, 2016.](#))

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The growing seniors segment also needs housing with universal design—improvements and innovations that make housing more usable for people regardless of their physical abilities or disabilities. This would allow seniors to live independently for as long as possible.

Any upgrade that can keep people in their homes for longer adds to their quality of life and likely offsets costs elsewhere as fewer retirement or nursing homes would be required. Offsetting these costs has a direct relation to energy consumption avoidance.

There is also the social sustainability of keeping people close to their social network of family and friends. This can help reduce the need for transportation to and from a more distant care facility option.

This means then that guidelines prepared for aging in place must encourage opportunities for energy efficiency, healthier indoor building environments and community design that meets changing requirements. Neighborhoods that are walkable, with convenient public transit, give the ability to age in place. Such communities need to be designed with sidewalks, safe street crossings and a variety of social, recreational, cultural, artistic and commercial spaces.

A Japanese study has even found that living in areas with walkable green spaces positively influenced the longevity of urban senior citizens. (*Urban residential environments and senior citizens' longevity in megacity areas: the importance of walkable green spaces*, by T Takano, K Nakamura, M Watanabe.)

It is important to make the retrofit process as simple as possible for homeowners. For example, a one-stop shopping intake model for grant and rebate programs, applications for financing, building permits, inspections and retrofit evaluation can overcome various deterrents.