

## COUNTY NEWS

### Oasis



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*Active seniors attracted by emphasis on community living at Wellings of Picton*

It is the first tangible product of the County's Age-in-Place strategy. The Wellings of Picton—an 88-unit apartment building designed and finished with independent seniors in mind—opened its doors in mid-December. It marks an important milestone—the first time the municipality has identified a structural need in the community and actively worked to encourage development to address that need.

The Age-in-Place strategy, when fully built out, will provide a variety of housing options and health care facilities—including potentially a new hospital and physicians' clinic—on the 20-acre site in which the H.J. McFarland Memorial Home is situated. Each is aimed at serving the demands of an aging demographic in Prince Edward County.

The Age-in-Place strategy has been criticized by some for intruding on the grounds of the nursing home facility and for providing incentives including water and wastewater services to the property's edge. Other seniors' residence providers say they could have used some municipal support for the folks they serve and house.

Yet, few deny the facilities are much-needed in the community—and absent a proactive appeal for development, it seems unlikely investment in this form of housing would have been made otherwise.

Detractors have not deterred the success of the first phase of the Wellings project. According to Rachel Henry, general manager of the project, 50 of the 88 units have been spoken for, just eight weeks since it opened. Henry expects it to be fully occupied by the end of the year.

"It is clear that the Wellings is offering a product people want," said Henry

The Wellings is designed for active and independent seniors

Residents also enjoy a wide range of other amenities—many geared to encouraging a community lifestyle without the intrusion of inclement weather. For example, each evening residents enjoy à la carte dining featuring such choices as smoked trout, pork tenderloin and mushroom risotto.



*Jean Dorenberg chats with fellow residents Charles and Barbara Culmer (L), and the gentleman John Pick during dinner.*

From the exterior, the Wellings looks like any other apartment building or mid-level suburban hotel. But inside, beyond the front desk and meeting room, the Wellings opens up to reveal a vast four-storey atrium. Designed to mimic a town square, the atrium centre is defined by an array of small trees. There are plenty of seating choices—for dining, for quiet enjoyment of a coffee, for a small gathering. One corner features an elegant grand piano for visiting entertainment. Another corner features a popular billiards table and games area. Nearby a very large LED screen provides communal television before an array of wing-backed chairs. Residents are currently enjoying *The Crown* on Netflix.

The design of this common space seems intent on summoning residents from their apartments—to join in the activities and take part in the range of human interaction available

in this climate-controlled public space.

The Wellings features a well-equipped fitness centre with an array of free weights, treadmills and such. Fitness trainer Tracy Powers offers regular health and wellness programs as well as classes aimed at helping residents enjoy their senior years.

A medical clinic is housed on site where residents may receive basic health information and advice on an appointment basis. A well-equipped beauty salon is also featured on the ground floor—accessed from the atrium.

Henry says most residents are either County residents or have children who live in the community.

The success of the Wellings in Picton is not likely to deter detractors of the Age-in-Place strategy—though it surely is good example of government guiding growth and investment in a way that contributes to the community.

Though not for everyone, the Wellings of Picton is filling an important role—and providing a much-needed housing alternative—for seniors wishing to remain in the County.

The County is required to redevelop McFarland nursing home prior to 2024—just seven years away. The Age-in-Place strategy provides a strong base upon which to begin this planning and implementation.

The province has also signalled its interest in seeing the business case for a new hospital to replace Prince Edward County Memorial Hospital. The existing hospital can't be retrofitted to meet current air handling, infection control and patient handling technology necessary in a modern hospital setting. The business case will consider a new facility on existing and adjacent hospital property—but there are strong arguments for building it on land set aside for that purpose behind McFarland nursing home and opposite the Wellings of Picton.

The concept of a campus setting dedicated to wellness, seniors living and health care has wide appeal for residents, investors and healthcare professionals. The Age-in-Place strategy represents the opportunity to create a community of care and living—designed in the County—for County residents.

The success of the Wellings of Picton bodes well for the future of the strategy—and perhaps a template for addressing other County issues.