

active seniors

Homes for life

Homes with accessible bedrooms, sinks, electrical switches, and lighting in the works

by Martin van den Hemel

Staff Reporter

Plans to densify the heart of Richmond with highrises and townhomes will include designs consistent with an aging-in-place philosophy.

Terry Crowe, the city's manager of policy planning, said the Official Community Plan includes guidelines for accessible, adaptable, convertible and barrier-free housing.

While some developers point out that accessible condos are often the last ones to sell, Crowe said the city is committed to promoting aging in place in multi-family dwellings, and is taking a long, hard look at how that will best work in the years to come.

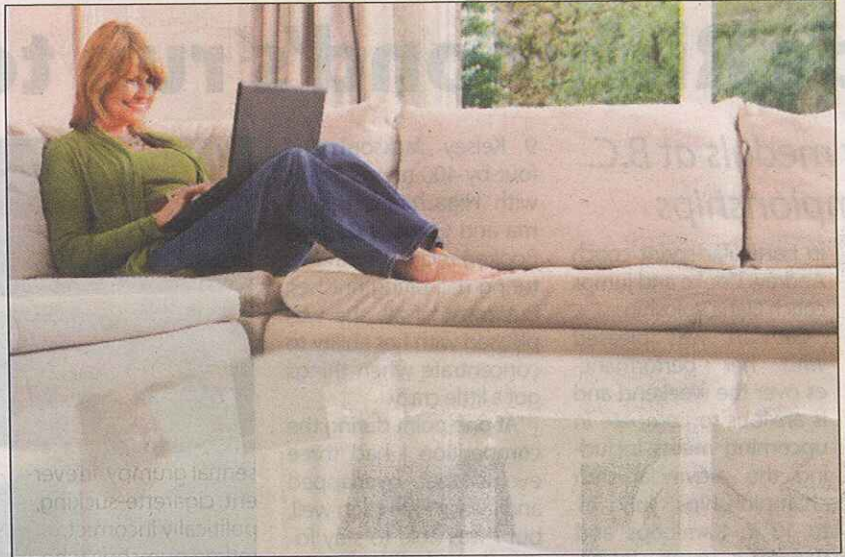
While adaptable housing—featuring such

things as bathrooms designed with stronger studs in the walls to facilitate the installation of grab bars, accessible bedrooms, patios, light switches and electrical outlets—will continue to be provided in new residential developments, it's still undecided whether this type of housing will be a requirement for all new housing.

Crowe said the city recognizes that it will become more common for people living in downtown core condos, to live in them for their entire lives, rather than the downsizing seen of empty-nesters who previously owned houses and relocated into smaller and more manageable homes.

The city will continue to consult with the Urban Development Institute, local seniors and the Richmond Centre for Disability, to determine how to best plan these future developments.

Is it really practical to make all homes accessible? Will everyone like the appearance of wider doors, hallways, and bigger washrooms? And will the community buy these homes if they're built this way?



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These are the types of questions that still need to be answered, but Crowe said at the very least, a percentage of accessible housing will be included in every project.

Then there's the concern that if all homes are built to be accessible, some buyers who don't like those features and don't immediately need them will go in and tear them out.

"We want to do that in a practical way," Crowe said of improving the accessibility bench-

mark.

Crowe noted that the city is already designing the downtown core to have another 200 acres of parkland added to the existing 200 acres, so people won't have far to walk to reach their neighbourhood park.

He said proximity to transit is always a consideration.

Wayne Craig, director of development for the City of Richmond, said some developers are jumping in feet first to raise accessibility standards.

He said Polygon, for example, has built a "very high" number of its condo units in their four-storey buildings with these standards.

The hurdle with making this type of housing mandatory is that the province needs to be on side as well, Craig said.

The current system of providing incentives to developers to build with this philosophy has resulted in some residential projects with 80 per cent of its units designed to achieve these standards.