

Young people face many challenges when imagining their future in the Halton Region, ranging from cost of living to convenience. A housing stock largely dominated by unaffordable premium housing, a severe lack of rental and supportive housing, and car oriented suburban planning push many young people away from the Halton Region. Together with a rising cost of living, it is incredibly difficult for the younger generation to establish a life in the region affordably and sustainably.

The majority of the Halton Region's housing supply is in the form of lower density, more expensive housing types. According to the Halton Region 2024 State of Housing Report, 62.3 per cent of the Halton Region's housing supply is in the form of lower density single and semi detached houses (Halton Region, "2024 State of Housing" 5), which tend to be significantly more expensive compared to higher density forms of housing. People seeking a higher density form of housing, such as young people who don't have large families, are restricted to a much smaller portion of the region's housing supply. Living in the Halton Region is very desirable for people of all demographics due to safety, quality of life, community infrastructure, etc and this exacerbates demand for high density housing units. This is further compounded by how much of the recently built high density housing units has been oriented towards investors. As investor demand for small condominium units has collapsed in recent years, a vital driving factor behind the new construction of additional high density housing in the Halton Region has also disappeared. These factors maintain the status quo of unaffordable large housing dominating the Halton Region, preventing young people from establishing their lives in the region.

The Halton Region also has a significant shortage of rental and supportive housing, often used by people as a "stepping stone" to live in a community. Rental housing specifically is

increasing in cost drastically over the past few years. In 2024, the average rent in Halton skyrocketed 10 per cent, well above the five year average of 5.6 per cent per year. Rental vacancy rates also continue to be well under the 3 per cent healthy rate, sitting at 2.3 per cent in 2024 (Halton Region, “2024 State of Housing” 16). The increased cost and low vacancy show the extremely high demand for rental housing in the Halton Region, which is not being alleviated by a significant increase in rental housing stock. Ultimately this keeps market rate affordable housing in the Halton Region at a cost that is unattainable to much of the younger population. This prevents them from establishing a life in the Halton community before they are able to commit to purchasing a home, pushing them to other regions with more affordable housing. The Halton Region also has an acute shortage of assisted housing such as emergency shelters and subsidized affordable housing. Halton Region emergency shelters are 40 per cent over capacity and 8048 households are on the waitlist for the region’s 5404 assisted housing units, all of which are occupied (Halton Region, “Addressing Supportive Housing Needs”). While there are projects in development such as 1258 Rebecca St. and 362 Margaret Dr. (Halton Region, “Assisted and Supportive Housing Construction”), these new developments don’t come close to fulfilling the total demand for supportive housing. Young people often don’t have the proper means to fully financially sustain themselves due to lower paying jobs and high expenses, sometimes needing assisted housing until they are able to secure financial stability. The lack of availability of this type of housing further discourages young people from imagining a future in the Halton Region.

The car-centric urban planning of communities in the Halton Region further discourages young people from planning a future in the region. Young people today are not as adamant

about buying a car compared to previous generations, with 36 per cent of Gen Z Canadians not owning a car compared to 15 per cent of the entire Canadian population not owning a car (Postelnyak). Instead, younger Canadians often rely on transportation methods such as public transit, cycling, and walking. However, in the Halton Region these methods of transportation are severely limited. Low density, single-use neighbourhoods force residents to travel long distances to do simple things like get groceries, necessitating driving. With car ownership being increasingly expensive due to rising car, insurance and fuel costs, cars are becoming unattainable to more of the young population, pushing them to communities that are convenient to live in without a car, often not in Halton. Even recent high density developments in Halton communities, often thought to be more pedestrian and transit friendly, are built as part of greenfield development sprawl far away from existing transit infrastructure such as GO Train lines. This forces residents to have to purchase a car in order to get around. Meanwhile the areas surrounding these transit hubs remain incredibly low density and underutilized. Some of the only places in the Halton Region where residents could not own a car with relative ease have no residential development. For young people who choose not to own a car, this means that opportunities to live comfortably in the Halton Region without owning a car are extremely limited. One must either buy a car to live in the Halton Region or not live in the Halton Region at all. This car-centric planning pushes many young people out of the Halton Region and into other more affordable and transit friendly communities.

These three main factors drive young people (especially those without a desire to raise a family) out of the Halton Region. It is simply not feasible nor sustainable for them to establish their lives here. While many of these problems require significant investment and government

support to fix, there are some fixes that can be implemented to make the Halton Region a more achievable place to live for young people. The region and its associated municipalities, together with funding from higher levels of government, could look to provide increased amounts of investment and support for rental and non-profit housing. This can be in the form of cooperative housing, Halton Community Housing Corporation housing, subsidized units of private developments, purpose built rental, or other types of housing. Increasing support for these types of housing can increase the size of the “stepping stone” that younger people can use to establish their lives in the Halton Region, while also relieving the extremely long waitlists for existing assisted housing stock. While this requires significant investment from many levels of government, it will lead to the Halton Region becoming far more inclusive to younger demographics. The region and municipalities can also look to plan new communities in ways that focus future residents around transportation infrastructure that will be available to them as soon as they move in, such that they will never need to purchase a car in the first place as convenient travel options will already exist. Finally, different levels of government can work towards accelerating the redevelopment of land around transit stations to be more pedestrian friendly and high density. This will provide much needed transit oriented housing which can be attainable and appealing for younger people, even if not subsidized itself as cheap and convenient transportation options around it exist. The Halton Region has and continues to be unattainable for the vast majority of young people. Changing that will require significant political will and support from all levels of government, purposeful investment, and public support. These changes can lead to the younger generation finally being able to imagine a future in the Halton Region, opening up the region to a demographic that has previously been

largely locked out. With these measures, the Halton Region can become the inclusive and equitable community it seeks to be.

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