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THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2023

FREE

Province demands older long-term care homes rebuild

Caressant Care remains silent on future of the Maples Home for Seniors



Construction on the new peopleCare long-term care home is well underway and expected to open on time next year.

By Lee Griffi, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The provincial government has made it crystal clear to aging long-term care homes that they must rebuild, but one of Tavistock's two homes remains tight-lipped about its future. The Maples Home for Seniors has not made public the future of its 'C' home, while peopleCare has started the redevelopment process.

The Gazette spoke to Ontario's former

Minister of Long-Term Care just days before he took on the new portfolio as head of the embattled Ministry of Housing and Rural Affairs. Paul Calandra said homes don't have a choice. "The reality is that I want all of them replaced, frankly. These older homes have to be replaced. There's no ifs ands or buts about it. They don't meet our current IPAC standards, they can't accommodate the staff that is required under the four hours of care, and they also don't allow us to bring in

additional diagnostic tools because we are starting to move towards a more integrated system where home care will also be connected with long-term care so people on home care might be able to get diagnostic services at a long-term care home as opposed to going to the hospital."

He added that some of the older homes don't have sprinklers and they will all be closed and replaced by newer homes but

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Opening of new EZT township office opening delayed

By Lee Griffi, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

East Zorra-Tavistock's new township office was expected to be open for business this month, but a number of delays have led to a new opening date. The project is now expected to be completed by November 17.

Township Chief Administrative Officer, Karen DePrest, said in an email that construction continues to progress. "There have been some delays due to supply chain issues, trade availability scheduling, and obviously some weather interruptions. The new projected occupancy date has been pushed back to November 17. Everyone is working together to achieve that timeline."

The new build had an original price tag of \$4.5 million, but council passed a \$5.575 million deal last year that has London's Michael Clark Construction developing what the township called a much-needed new headquarters. Council opted to award the tender to the lowest bidder, and nine of the eleven submissions were within \$1 million of each other.

"We are in continual dialogue with the contractor and meet with them onsite bi-weekly. However, while construction is underway, the facility is in possession of the contractor. As is typical for these situations, we cannot, under the terms of the contract, provide operational details on behalf of the contractor with regard to their supply of goods and/or tradespeople under contract." She added the township will be providing an update to council when the project has finished to address any outstanding issues that could have an impact on residents, taxpayers, or the community.

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COMMUNITY —

Province demands older long-term care homes rebuild

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at the same time the ministry understands the value of small-town homes. "We want to keep homes in the smaller communities for a number of reasons. We want people to be close to their communities. We saw during the pandemic how important that is." He added the other aspect is that many of these homes are the biggest employers and major property tax contributors. "These homes are also in the areas where we have wait lists and challenges with home care. We want those homes in the smaller communities." There are a few other projects that have been approved in Oxford County. A 194-bed Woodingford Lodge (run by the county) is slated for Ingersoll, peopleCare is building a 160-bed in Tillsonburg, and Caressant Care is upgrading part of its 164-bed home in Woodstock. Nearly all of the 60 thousand beds allocated by the province have been spoken for but there is still more to be done. "The goal is to have them all rebuilt or replaced by 2028," explained Calandra. "We had a program that ended (August 31, 2023), and it doubled the funding to get shovels in the ground because everyone had challenges with rising costs, so we knew we had to do something to keep the building going." Stan Cho has taken over the portfolio after leading the Ministry of Seniors and Accessibility. Cho hasn't said yet if he plans on pushing the rebuilding agenda like his predecessor did. That remains to be seen.

Natalie Dechert is the Vice President of Operations at Caressant Care, the company that owns and operates The Maples along with 14 other long-term care homes in Ontario. She would not mention any specific projects but said they do have some plans in the works. "We appreciate the Government of Ontario's support for improving infrastructure in long-term care homes throughout the province and we are working with the Ministry of Long-Term Care on future redevelopment

projects for eligible homes. Projects are currently in the planning stage with the ministry. As soon as we're able, we will share these plans with our residents and the communities that we serve."

Prior to the pandemic, The Maples had 43 beds, which was reduced to 36 when three and four-bed ward rooms were taken away from older homes. Long-term care homes today are not built or rebuilt unless they are well over 100 beds due to factors such as economy of scale and the lack of available financing as a result. Dechert added despite several older homes in the company, Caressant Care is always striving to create warm, friendly, and caring homes for their residents. "Our organization operates primarily in smaller towns, so we try to emulate these values every day by creating tight-knit communities with safe, high-quality care. In keeping with this spirit, all our homes continue to be maintained to a high standard, with us making the necessary upgrades to ensure residents are comfortable."

Calandra admitted the long-term care sector has seen its challenges, but he's confident newly built homes are changing attitudes. "Obviously, the pandemic, the (Elizabeth) Wettlaufer case, had a lot of people thinking twice about long-term care. We are trying to help people understand the long-term care that you may have been used to and where we are going are completely different things. These new homes are truly different. We are seeing staff want to come back, and people are building up more confidence."

peopleCare's Vice-President of Communications and Engagement, Sheena Campbell, said her company believes the sector is an integral part of the health system, and they will continue to collaborate and integrate with home care and other partners. "Building solutions-oriented health system partnerships is a peopleCare strength and a focus

as we build out our new homes as part of planned senior living communities. This will enable seniors to live and age well, receiving a range of care, services, and housing options, along with community-based health and social supports, all in one place, including diagnostics available to residents through peopleCare and our community partners."

She added they are strong advocates for enhancing diagnostics in the sector, including through their participation on the ministry's provincial technical advisory table and a working group with the Ontario Long-Term Care Association. "We appreciate the ministry's ongoing support, the discussions with long-term care providers

at that advisory table, and funding new diagnostic equipment in all our homes. New funding for Nurse Practitioners (NP) is another example, enabling us to add a new, even higher level of clinician onsite to support our clinical team in rapidly diagnosing issues and supporting residents in making informed decisions about their care. We are currently recruiting for an NP for peopleCare Tavistock."

Campbell adds she is thrilled with the construction progress in Tavistock. "The footings and foundations are poured for the building perimeter and the interior courtyard. The new 128-bed home remains on schedule to open in 2024."

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