

Leo Groarke: Housing is top of mind as Trent's academic year begins

University has plans to ease the crunch in sustainable ways, Leo Groarke writes.

By Leo Groarke

Guest Columnist

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Trent University officials and dignitaries gathered for the official groundbreaking for the Trent University Durham campus expansion project on May 17. - Jason Liebrechts/Torstar

It's back to school time. At Trent, our first-years have already arrived. The rest of the student body will be joining them by week's end. They remind me of birds returning home at the end of a long winter — a welcome sight which bodes well for our short- and long-term future.

Peterborough is lucky to have two successful post-secondary institutions. Trent and Fleming contribute to the community in so many ways; financially, socially and culturally. Hosting the Women's U19 World Lacrosse Championships is a wonderful example of the things we can accomplish together with the city.

One of the benefits we bring is economic. Together, we contribute a billion dollars to the local economy every year. Even more importantly, it is our graduates who are building our future. It will be their businesses, services and cultural activities that make Peterborough flourish.

Economic impact is important, because it is among the most effective ways to provide resources to respond to the social and cultural issues of the day. During this particular summer, the issue that has everyone talking is housing — or rather the lack of it — in our community.

At Trent we are working on a number of projects which help alleviate the housing crunch. The university's board of governors has already approved a planning process that should culminate in two new residence developments. One will be a new college on the Symons campus, the other will be a residence at Catharine Parr Traill, Trent's downtown college.

This is a major undertaking which will significantly expand the space available for students who come to study at Trent. Two other initiatives can provide other kinds of housing.

One of them is a seniors/eldercare village at a time when demographic changes are creating a pressing need to provide seniors with housing, assisted living and critical care beds. The village will provide revenue for the university as well as some significant opportunities for faculty research and experiential learning in a range of programs (nursing, kinesiology and the social sciences).

For more than 10 years, the university has been discussing another "village" development. The Trent Lands Plan envisages the construction of a "sustainable village," a living, learning, working residential area beside the campus that would highlight best practices in community development.

There are other possibilities that can be connected with Trent's Cleantech Commons, which aims to be Canada's premier destination for the development of clean technology and green business. Trent is working with the federal government on the possibility of a new accelerator building for the research park. The private developer we are working with is interested in residential as well as research and commercial space.

These projects are complex undertakings, but they can be accomplished with a methodical approach which puts together the necessary pieces with the support of partners, both private

and public — all while retaining 60 per cent of our 1,400 acres as green space, nature and buffer areas.

As I write this column, Trent is constructing a \$30-million residence and academic building on our Durham Campus which is the result of a gift of land from the City of Oshawa, a multimillion-dollar grant from the region, layers of permits and approvals, and a partnership with a private partner who is providing the capital for the project.

In Peterborough, Trent is well positioned to move forward in a way that will support the community's need to alleviate its current housing shortage.

Leo Groarke is the President and Vice-Chancellor of Trent University.