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NV seniors population to double by year 2027

More services needed to handle growth

BY TOM CARNEY, SPECIAL TO NORTH SHORE NEWS JULY 24, 2011

OUR second annual seniors quiz, featured in my last column, proved to be extremely popular.

Florence writes, "I'm new to the North Shore and your column has been of interest to me. I would like to see more items about North Vancouver to help me feel I know my new community better."

Well Florence, the United Way has developed a series of community profiles on the seniors population for each municipality in the Metro Vancouver region.

Let's take a look at the report for North Vancouver. North Vancouver encompasses both the City and the District of North Vancouver with the city representing about a third of the total population.

North Vancouver's median age makes it the third oldest community in the region. Its seniors population accounts for 6.4 per cent of all seniors region-wide.

North Vancouver currently has a slightly higher proportion of low-income seniors than average, and overall the population is less diverse than most.

The number of older adults in North Vancouver will nearly double by 2027, even though its share of the region's seniors at that time is expected to be slightly lower than it is today (5.7 per cent).

It's that last stat that really caught my eye. The idea that the projected growth rate for seniors in North Vancouver will fall well below the average of the region may come as a surprise to some. We are looking at a migration of seniors from the urban areas to the outlying areas of the Metro Vancouver region over the next 20 years and nowhere is that more apparent than on the North Shore.

Municipalities with the largest projected increase in the seniors population in the next two decades are Squamish, Whistler and Pemberton, (244 per cent) the Tri-Cities area (188 per cent) and Richmond (163 per cent). West Vancouver will experience the least percentage change (56 per cent) followed by Vancouver (82 per cent) and North Vancouver (94 per cent).

Now given this and a challenging fiscal environment, agencies serving seniors are being told by government and by funders that if the sector could amalgamate into fewer agencies we'd save on administrative costs and find other efficiencies. I'm in the research business and I'm not aware of any study that suggests an optimum number of service providers for any population, or anything that suggests that a small agency is less efficient than government or a private company.

Still, the question remains: Do we have too many agencies serving seniors on the North Shore? The United Way says we do not. They used a formula that matches the number of agencies in the Red Book - A Directory of Services for the Lower Mainland - to the area's seniors population. They found that a rough match appears to exist between the size of the population 65+ and the number of services focusing on seniors in both North and West Vancouver.

We have most of the needed services for seniors in North Vancouver, the exceptions being education and training, transportation services and financial assistance.

So, what does the community profile tell us? Well, the North Shore is a low-growth area. The growth

in total population for North Vancouver over the next two decades is projected to be about half the rate of the region as a whole.

The number of seniors aged 65 and up, however, will nearly double in North Vancouver over the same period. That suggests to me that we will need more services for seniors in our community, not less.

I'll take a look at the community profile for seniors in West Vancouver in a future column.

Tom Carney is the co-ordinator of the Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society. Ideas for future columns are welcome. Contact him at 604-985-3852 or send an email to lions_view@telus.net.